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# WALT WHITMAN

## THE MAN AND THE POET

BY

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*(Author of "THE CITY OF DREADFUL NIGHT")*



WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

It is not, perhaps, at all necessary that I should write an Introduction to the present booklet. "The words of Mercury are harsh after the songs of Apollo," and I know very well that any words of mine must have little value or interest as compared with those of James Thomson. Why then do I write any but the briefest prefatory note to the present *brochure*? Well, to be quite candid with the reader, simply because it pleases me to do so. The subject is to me an attractive one, and the present opportunity of writing upon it is one which I am unwilling to let pass.

"The labour we delight in physics pain,"  
And tasks we love bring ever priceless gain.

Whatever else may be in dispute about Whitman, it is at least certain that he is a good subject to write about. It is possible when discoursing about him to survey almost the whole range of questions relating to religion, morals, politics, art and poetry. This may, perhaps, account for the fact that there is now a small library of books about him, not to mention a large number of uncollected articles in reviews and periodicals. It is difficult, therefore, to say anything new about him—or at least to say anything which is at once new and true. Therefore, I shall not trouble myself overmuch about the originality or non-originality of my

remarks. It is better to say a true thing, even though it has been said before, than to utter the most original of falsities. All I shall endeavour to do will be to give a colouring derived from my own temperament to whatever I may find to say. If I do this I shall satisfy myself, if not my readers.

No one man's verdict—though he were the best of critics—can be accepted as conclusive as to the merits of such a writer as Whitman; for in the case of authors who depart, as he did, from the established conventions, it is necessary to take account of the critic's own temperament before we can place any reliance upon his judgment. I do not think that Matthew Arnold ever expressed in print any opinion about Whitman, but if he had ever been called upon to do so I feel sure that his verdict would have been an adverse one. The "barbaric yawp" of the uncultivated American must have been inexpressibly distressing to the nice ears of the apostle of sweetness and light. Almost all critics indeed are wanting in real catholicity of taste; and to have a keen appreciation of one kind of excellence seems to involve, as a consequence, an insensibility to excellence of another kind. It is quite evident that Whitman must not be judged by the standard that we apply to Keats, Tennyson or Swinburne. This implies that anyone who values form above substance, will certainly decide against Whitman. It is the American poet's first demand upon us that we shall dismiss our prepossessions in favour of the poets of culture from our minds — not asking whether he conforms to the rules which we apply

to them, but whether he has a new message for the world, which demands a new and freer method for its fit expression. If we are not willing thus to reconsider our established ideas as to the art of poetry, we had better conclude that Whitman has no message for us, and concern ourselves no further about him. I think it will be found that whenever Whitman has failed to find favour in the eyes of his critics—except in cases where they have been influenced by what they have regarded as his offences against decency—it has always been from the cause I have indicated, namely, that they have judged him by a standard as false as if we judged the scenery of the Swiss mountains by the same rules that we apply to a carefully cultivated flower garden. It is a great point in Whitman's favour that while the critics, who have assailed him most fiercely, have been men of little note,\* or have preferred to write anonymously—those who have most warmly taken his part have been men—and women too—whose names are held in the highest honour amongst us. I am inclined to think that the ablest of Whitman's opponents was Peter Bayne, but that gentleman is now a good deal deader than the proverbial door-nail; nor are any other of the poet's adverse critics (so far as I know) any more alive than he. On the other hand those who have most warmly approved of Whitman's work, including Professor Dowden, W. M. Rossetti, Moncure Conway, J. A. Symonds,

\* I do not of course rank Swinburne as a critic of little note, but since he wrote both for and against Whitman, he need hardly be taken into account.

James Thomson and Mrs. Gilchrist, are all as much alive among us as ever in the spirit, if not in the flesh.

No book ever written—or perhaps I had better say no non-theological work—has excited more controversy, or has proved more effectual in raising the passions both of its assailants and of its admirers than “Leaves of Grass.” It is, it must be admitted, a provocative book, and there are many points about it which lend themselves readily to ridicule or parody. The author took no pains to conceal his belief that all other poets were in the wrong, and that he alone was in the right. It is no wonder, therefore, that he aroused so much animosity, or that he was denounced as a charlatan or impostor, who, since he was unable to gain a reputation by legitimate means, determined to create a sensation by singularity and uncouthness of style and substance. His eulogists have claimed for him that he is the only authentic American poet, in comparison with whom all others are but pale copies of European models; while his assailants have denounced him as a dealer in pornographic filth, a writer of tuneless doggrel, and as “the laureate of the empty deep of the incomprehensible.” More curiously still, he has had the good or bad fortune—I know not which to call it—of being at one time enthusiastically hailed by our foremost modern lyrists as “the greatest of America’s voices,” and on another occasion reviled in the choicest Swinburnian Billingsgate. But, perhaps, in both cases we need not attach too much importance to the fervid rhetoric and un-

measured pronouncements of our English Hugo: we had best, it may be, look upon his ebullitions as Lamb sometimes viewed the monologues of Coleridge, as "only his fun."

When a writer is thus furiously assailed and thus warmly defended, it is perhaps not unreasonable to conclude that neither assailants nor defenders are altogether in the right, and that the truth may possibly lie somewhere between them. An ordinary writer never excites such extremes of praise or blame; it is necessary that an author should have some uncommon qualities, or else he would be treated with the indifference which is usually the lot of mediocrity. If then we conclude that the truth about Whitman is, that he is neither so great as his idolaters think, nor so worthless as his detractors represent him to be, we shall most likely not be altogether wrong. Being myself neither a Whitmaniac nor a Whitmanophobe, I shall endeavour in the following observations to hold the balance as evenly as I can between Whitman's admirers and assailants. Whatever the worth of my opinions may be, they have not been hastily formed, nor have they been influenced even by the consideration that many excellent judges and critics in England, if not in America, have pronounced themselves warmly in Whitman's favour. Yet it must be confessed that when one begins to study the man and his work it is difficult to avoid falling under the influence of a certain spell which they have about them, and which biasses the judgment perhaps to an undue extent. But is not this the case with all works of more than common excel-

lence? Is it not indeed the great proof of their excellence? Works of inferior merit do not thus affect us, and that they do not do so is the proof of their inferiority. In the same way we say of a woman, who may not perhaps be over well-favoured by nature, that she has a charm about her, and that charm makes her more attractive than many of her sisters who are more beautiful than she is.

It is not possible to do justice to any author without first enquiring what object he set himself to accomplish in his work. If his aim is a low or unworthy one, that alone condemns his work; if he aims high, that is at least a point in his favour, even though he fails in his attempt. Let us see then what account Whitman himself gives of the motives which led him to write his "*Leaves of Grass.*" Perhaps the best and completest statement of these is to be found in the Preface to the original edition of that work; but as I have failed to find therein a paragraph brief enough and significant enough to be quoted here, I select in preference a passage from a review of "*Leaves of Grass,*" written by its author—for Whitman, like Garrick, was his own reviewer, whenever he could find or make an opportunity—which sums up in the most characteristic way the objects which the poet aimed at. Authors usually assume an air of modesty, however little they may really have of that quality; but Whitman, it will be seen, was not without a quite sufficient amount of self-esteem.

"Self-reliant, with haughty eyes, assuming to himself all the attributes of his country, steps Walt Whitman into literature, talking like a man unaware that there

was ever hitherto such a production as a book, or such a being as a writer. Every move of him has the free play of the muscle of one who never knew what it was to feel that he stood in the presence of a superior. Every word that falls from his mouth shows silent disdain and defiance of the old theories and forms. Every phrase announces new laws; not once do his lips unclose except in conformity with them. With light and rapid touch he first indicates in prose the principles of the foundation of a race of poets so deeply to spring from the American people and become ingrained through them, that their Presidents shall not be the common referees so much as that great race of poets shall. He proceeds himself to exemplify this new school, and set models for their expression and range of subjects. He makes audacious and native use of his own body and soul. He must recreate poetry with the elements always at hand. He must imbue it with himself as he is, disorderly, fleshy and sensual, a lover of things, yet a lover of men and women above the whole of the other objects of the universe. His work is to be achieved by unusual methods. Neither classic nor romantic is he, nor a materialist any more than a spiritualist. Not a whisper comes out of him of the old stock talk and rhyme of poetry—not the first [?least] recognition of gods or goddesses, or Greece or Rome. No breath of Europe, or her monarchies or priestly conventions, or her notions of gentlemen and ladies, founded on the idea of caste, seems ever to have fanned his face or been inhaled into his lungs . . . The style of these poems, therefore, is simply their own style, just born and red. Nature may have given the hint to the author of 'Leaves of Grass,' but there exists no book or fragment of a book that can have given the hint to them. All beauty, he says, comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. His rhythm and uniformity he will conceal in the roots of

his verses, not to be seen of themselves, but to break forth loosely as lilacs on a bush, and take shapes compact as the shapes of melons, or chestnuts, or pears."

Did ever a poet, before or since, make such enormous claims for himself? Wordsworth was certainly not deficient in self-esteem, and assuredly did not estimate his works at too low a rate; but his vanity was modesty itself compared with that of Whitman. To claim, at so late a period of the world's history, complete originality of thought and entire freshness of material, as Whitman does for himself in the above passage, is obviously a contention that cannot be sustained, and which may be dismissed at once even without examining the poet's work. Complete originality of thought and matter was only possible to a poet in the infancy of the world, and it cannot now be achieved even by a lunatic bard. All that the greatest poet can now accomplish is so to recreate the old thought and the old materials by passing them through the alembic of his own imagination that they are seen in a new and more vivid light, and attain a new meaning and significance. To do this is to do quite enough, and it is in vain that more is asked for. Even Shakespeare accomplished no more than this. Did Whitman do so much as this? That is a question that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, but may, perhaps, if we are confined to an epigrammatic reply, be answered with a yes *and* no. To put my own opinion into the shortest possible form, I think the truth is that Whitman, though he was not as he thought himself, the first as well as the greatest of American

poets, was yet a very considerable personality, and one who is well worth studying for his own sake, and for the message which he gave forth.

If we ask what are the leading ideas which are particularly characteristic of Whitman's poetry or philosophy, we shall find that his disciples are not altogether in agreement about them. However, I think we shall find in the following passage from Mr. Sloane Kennedy's "Reminiscences of Walt Whitman," a sufficient indication of what are usually accounted to be his root ideas.

"Walt Whitman is the evangelist of the human heart, the poet of universal humanity. The office of such men in the world is to break up stereotyped thought and institutions, and set free the creative force again; and the hammer that smites and the arrow that flies and the hand that wields are not tools of the Deity, but Deity itself at work.

"The moral principles running all through Whitman's writings are patriotism, liberty, personal freedom; be yourself to yourself a law; belief in your own soul's intuitions; equal honour to the body and mind; reverence for self, to know that the sun and moon hang in the sky for you, whoever you are; woman the equal of man and to be equally honoured; moral heroism, to confront odds undaunted, and abide one's time; faith in nature, to be joyous as nature is joyous; to exhibit and cultivate manly affections, the love of man (*vir*) for man; sympathy for the ignorant and suffering, not excluding the lowest types. All these may be summed up in one word—MANLINESS—'Produce great persons, the rest follows.'"

Very well: we will accept this as a fair, if not complete summary of the message which Whitman

has given to the world. It is, with one or two exceptions, a very good message, and one which the world will doubtless be the better for heeding. But is there a single item in it which can be claimed as Whitman's own, or which has not been advocated by many teachers before him? As for the apostles of patriotism, have we not had enough and to spare of them? Of the proclaimers of liberty, are they not too numerous to mention? or, if names are demanded, is it not enough to mention those of Burns, Byron and Shelley? As to personal freedom, is not that included in the last clause? No man, it seems to me, deserves the name of Liberal or Radical who is not an advocate of personal freedom, which does not and cannot, I take it, mean anything more than such a degree of freedom for a man's self as does not in any way interfere with the rights of his neighbours to an equal degree of freedom. "Be yourself to yourself a law"—surely a very perilous recommendation to the many to whom the only law that appeals to them is the law of selfishness. "Reverence for self, etc."—yes! but here also we shall presently find that Whitman had been anticipated. "Woman the equal of man"—does Whitman really teach this? It may be so; but surely the assertion requires to be qualified in many ways before it can be accepted as true. "Moral heroism"—yes, by all means; but was not that taught by Marcus Aurelius, Socrates, and many other philosophers? "Faith in nature"—certainly! but did not Traherne and Wordsworth teach us that long before Whitman was born? And so I might

go on to the end of the passage, but it is surely unnecessary.

Of course it would be unfair to press such points as these against Whitman, but for the facts that he made such large claims for himself, and that his admirers have also made them for him. It may be frankly allowed that, with two or three debateable exceptions, his teachings are wholesome, bracing and manly; and that those who learn from him will almost certainly become better citizens and better men. His work therefore justifies itself, as any work which enforces the old and elementary moralities with any degree of new force and freshness of treatment justifies itself. And it may be allowed moreover that Whitman's method, free as it is from any suspicion of preachiness or of didactic dulness, is well calculated to influence his readers in the best of all ways—that is to say without their being conscious that they are being taught or persuaded. There is life, energetic and full-flowing, in Whitman's work, and no mere simulation of vitality. "Leaves of Grass" may be a much more faulty work than Wordsworth's "Excursion," but not even its most hostile critics have accused it of being dull, whereas "The Excursion" has not escaped that charge. Voltaire's "Candide," as compared with Dr. Johnson's "Rasselias," is not fuller of life and spirit than is "Leaves of Grass" as compared with "The Excursion." To say that Wordsworth looked upon men as upon trees walking would be unjust; yet what a vast difference there is between the spirit in which he writes and that of Whitman! We listen to the one impatiently—if we listen at all—

because we feel that with all his good qualities he is yet not one of ourselves, and so can only have an imperfect degree of sympathy with us; whereas with Whitman, even as we do with Robert Burns, we feel that he is in complete sympathy with us, since he has passed through our experiences, undergone our troubles, known our temptations, and felt our sorrows. He is not outside us, or above us, but a part of ourselves; not so much a man as humanity itself. When this is realised it at once becomes apparent that whatever may be the worth of Whitman's artistic theory, or however faulty his method of delivering his message, these things should not affect, or only in a very small degree, our estimate of his work. The only real question we have to consider is whether his message was one of which the world stood in need, or whether it was calculated to act as an influence for good where so many other messages had failed? And here, I think, we come to the vital distinction between the gospel according to Walt Whitman and all other gospels. Every other gospel with which I am acquainted, either explicitly or tacitly assumes that its acceptance does or should produce a new spirit, a rebirth, or an entire reformation in the lives of its converts. Whether such a change was ever really effected in a man's nature or disposition I will not now stop to discuss, though I am not without a strong conviction upon the subject. But it is surely a better way of influencing a man whom you desire to guide towards a better way of life, to make it clear to him that you come to him not as a superior being to lecture him upon

his sins, but as a man like himself, not claiming to be any better than he is, and only desiring to render him such help as one good comrade would give to another, and would himself be willing to receive in his turn. Did ever any teacher before Whitman employ this method? It seems so obviously the right thing to do that it may perhaps have been previously done; but I cannot now recall any instance of its employment. It is probable indeed that the method may often have been employed, consciously or unconsciously, by good men quite unknown to fame, in their intercourse with their fellows; but it is certain that most of those who have thought they had a message to communicate to mankind have adopted, perhaps almost inevitably, an attitude of superiority towards those whom they addressed. If Whitman had taught mankind no other lesson than that their true redeemer is not a being above humanity, not even a super-man, but is one like themselves; not exempt from their faults, and only differing from them in having a richer and more abundant vitality, or in a word, a deeper humanity than themselves, he would have deserved well of the human race, and should ever be held in grateful remembrance. The way to uplift mankind is not by making man into a god, but by developing his manliness to the fullest extent. In that direction only is there hope for us—and if that hope fails it is better that humanity should perish. The gospel of godliness has been tried for many centuries with very dubious results; let us now give the gospel of manliness a trial.

Summing up the matter, it seems evident that Whitman, in spite of the fact that he was a very imperfect artist, because he was wanting in patience, taste, and the sense of humour, had yet the root of the matter in him, and really had a message to impart to his fellows which they would do well to heed. His outlook upon life was the right one; and he saw more clearly than such teachers as Carlyle, Emerson, and Matthew Arnold, the kind of counsel needed by the average man to guide him through the trials, temptations, and perplexities of life. He taught men that to live in accordance with their instincts,\* and not in submission to theological or ethical formulas imposed upon them from without, is the true wisdom; and that no good is to be derived from ascetic practices, or from the mortification of the flesh. He proclaimed that there is no sin involved in the satisfaction of the normal appetites of man's nature; the sin lies rather in denying them their proper gratification. If the most important of all arts is the art of living, a man can hardly choose a better teacher than Walt Whitman. He will set you no impossible tasks, will fill you with no East wind of dogmatic formulas, will threaten you with no hell, and promise you no heaven; he will simply take you by the hand, and by telling you that he himself has found life supremely well worth living, will show that you

\* Of course it may be objected that not all our instincts are good, and therefore we cannot safely live in accordance with them. But no doubt the reader will understand that I am speaking here with some freedom of expression, and leaving him to make the necessary qualifications of my statements.

also may find your profit in it if you will. To have done this is surely to have done a good service to mankind. It is true that his teaching was not so original as he thought it was, but he did at least proclaim his faith with a strength of conviction and a persuasive force with which it had not before been pleaded. Whitman the man and Whitman the poet were one and the same; there was no divorce in profession and practice between them; he put himself into his books, and it is easier for us to gain an intimate knowledge of his character and his actions than we can gain of the true nature of those whom we meet in daily and familiar intercourse. From first to last there was a splendid unity in his whole career; there was no action of his life which could be picked out as inconsistent with his character, or unworthy of his professions. To live thus completely in accordance with the promptings of one's own nature is not perhaps to be entirely happy in one's life, but it is surely to enjoy the greatest amount of happiness that is possible to man. Perhaps the chief cause of the unhappiness of most men is that the elements of their natures, instead of being properly co-ordinated, and so working together in complete harmony as they did in Traherne and Whitman, are so little in unison with one another that they cannot work together for any good end. That a man should be at one with himself, and should entertain no misgivings as to the path which he should follow or the goal which he has in view, is the most fortunate thing that can befall him.

It is a curious thing that a writer, of whom it

is most unlikely that Whitman ever heard, not only anticipated many of the later poet's ideas, but also his peculiar style of rhythmical prose.\* In the appendix to my edition of the Poems of Thomas Traherne (who was born about 1636 and died in 1674), I have drawn attention to some of the points in which he anticipated the American poet. Could it be shewn indeed that Whitman had ever met with Traherne's "Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God," it would be difficult not to believe that he must have been deeply indebted to it. As my edition of Traherne's "Poetical Works" is not likely to be in the hands of many of the readers of the present work, I will here repeat what I have said therein as to the resemblances between the English and the American poets. Of course there were points of difference as well as of resemblance between them; but certainly a believer in the doctrine of the transmigration of souls would find little difficulty in believing that the soul of Traherne was reincarnated in that of Whitman.

In 1699—twenty-five years after Traherne's death—there was published anonymously a little volume of 146 pages entitled "A Serious and Patheticall Contemplation of the Mercies of God, in several Devout and Sublime Thanksgivings for the same." It was this book, it may be mentioned in passing,

\* It seems pretty evident in fact that the models which Whitman had more immediately before him were Martin Tupper's "Proverbial Philosophy," and Samuel Warren's "The Lily and the Bee." Both were indeed very poor models, and could have furnished little or nothing more than the mere framework or ground-plan of "Leaves of Grass."

that gave the clue, which, being following up, led to the discovery that Traherne was the author of the two manuscript volumes of which Mr. W. T. Brooke was the first to discover the value. The book consists of a series of "Thanksgivings" for the Body and Soul of Man, the Glory of God's Works, the Blessedness of God's Ways, the Wisdom of His Word, etc. In them the author in a manner much like Whitman's, particularly in the way in which he catalogues or enumerates every object he can think of which bears any relation to the subject in hand, surveys the whole known universe, and finds all things in it to be not only good in themselves, but perfectly adapted to serve mankind. Like Whitman, Traherne was a thorough optimist and could or would see nothing wrong in the constitution of the world.\* That two such remarkable men, clear-sighted as they were in some respects, should, in spite of the many evidences before them of the thousand evils by which the mass of mankind is afflicted, nevertheless persist in believing that "All's well with the world," is a singular proof of the power of temperament to induce men to see in the facts before them just what they wish to see. It is the error of optimist and pessimist alike that they reason from their own experience or standpoint as to the general conditions of human

\* So difficult is it for men to think of the universe in any other way than as it is related to themselves, that it seldom or never occurs to them that though the world—as Leopardi has proved—is in reality very ill-fitted to be a comfortable abiding-place for mankind, it is not therefore to be condemned, inasmuch as it may have some other purpose, unknown to us, which it may efficiently fulfil.

life. It is, it must be allowed, a very pardonable error, since every man is and must be to himself a more significant object than all other objects in existence. If a man is of little or no importance in his own eyes, then nothing in the world can be of any significance to him.

But let me get back to my theme, which is the resemblance between the two writers in their outlook upon the world and upon humanity. Let me first quote a stanza from a poem of Traherne's, in which we find the title of Whitman's chief work anticipated:—

“ One Star  
Is better far  
Than many precious stones :  
One Sun, which is by its own lustre seen,  
Is worth ten thousand Golden Thrones :  
*A juicy Herb, or Spire of Grass*  
In useful Virtue, native Green,  
An emerald doth surpass ;  
Hath in’t more value, though less seen.”

Here is a stanza from another poem, in which the same lesson is enforced.

“ The World set in Man’s Heart, and yet not his !  
Why all the compass of this great Abyss,  
Th’ united Service and Delight,  
Its Beauty that attracts the Sight,  
That Goodness which I find,  
Doth gratify my Mind ;  
The common Air and Light  
That shines, doth me a Pleasure,  
And surely is my Treasure :  
Of it I am th’ inclusive Sphere,  
It doth entire in me appear  
As well as I in it : it gives me Room,  
Yet lies within my Womb.”

Need I say that Traherne enforces in these stanzas, as he does continually in his other poems, the lesson which Whitman also is never tired of expounding, namely, the lesson of the worthlessness of the objects of artificial value in comparison with the really valuable natural objects which may be enjoyed by all, and on which all life and all happiness depend?

The parallel passages between Traherne and Whitman that might be quoted are very numerous; but it will be sufficient for my purpose to cite only three or four of them here. And first let me quote that fine sentence in which Traherne sums up so incomparably well the whole faith of the poet and the lover of nature:—

“You never enjoy the world aright till the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars; and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more than so, because men are in it who are every one sole heirs as well as you.”

Without loving our fellows, Traherne tells us, we are desolate, and only by loving them is enjoyment possible to us:—

“Yea, by loving thou expandest and enlargest thyself, and the more thou lovest art the more glorious. Thou lovest all thy friends' friends; and needest not to fear any dearth of love or danger of insufficiency. For the more thou lovest thy friend, thy Sovereign Friend, the more thou lovest all His Friends. Which showeth the endless proneness of love to increase and never to decay. O my soul thou livest in all whom thou lovest; and in them enjoyest all their treasures.”

This last passage is hardly one to which we might expect to find a close parallel in Whitman; yet is there not a really wonderful resemblance in spirit and even in substance between it and the following passage from "Leaves of Grass"?

"Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge  
that pass all argument of the Earth,  
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,  
And that all men ever born are also my brothers, and the  
women are my sisters and lovers."

Traherne, no less than Whitman, had a deep conviction that the spirit of God was the brother of his own; and he was also convinced that if God was necessary to him, he was no less necessary to God. Both were, in short, convinced that the Power which informs and animates the universe is not a despotic monarch ruling over a subservient empire, but rather the one spirit that dwells in all things, though it manifests itself in an infinity of different forms.

Whether the next passage I shall quote from Traherne would, if it had been made known to Whitman, have more delighted him because of its revelation of a spirit so much in unison with his own; or would more have vexed him because it would have shown him that his so-much-vaunted originality of matter and style did not really belong to him, it is useless to enquire; but it would certainly have astonished him not a little. Is there in all the records of literary parallels a more remarkable instance of resemblance than that between the following extract from Traherne's "Serious and

Patheticall Contemplation," and the whole spirit and tendency of "Leaves of Grass"? There may be similar instances where one writer has, consciously or unconsciously, borrowed from another; but I cannot now recall any such instance where it was not possible to suspect that the second writer had borrowed from the first.

" O Lord, the children of my people are thy peculiar treasures,  
Make them mine, O God, even while I have them,  
My lovely companions, like Eve in Eden !  
So much my treasure that all other wealth is without them  
    But dross and poverty.  
Do they not adorn and beautifie the World,  
    And gratify my Soul which hateth Solitude !  
Thou, Lord, hast made thy servant a sociable creature, for  
    which I praise thy name,  
A lover of company, a delighter in equals ;  
Replenish the inclination which thyself hath implanted,  
    And give me eyes  
    To see the beauty of that life and comfort  
Wherewith those by their actions  
    Inspire the nations.  
Their markets, Tillage, Courts of Judicature,  
    Marriages, Feasts and Assemblies, Navies, Armies,  
Priests and Sabbaths, Trades and Business, the voice of the  
    Bridegroom, Musical Instruments, the light of Candles,  
    and the grinding of Mills  
Are comfortable, O Lord, let them not cease.  
The riches of the land are all the materials of my felicity  
    in their hands :  
They are my Factors, Substitutes, and Stewards ;  
Second Selves, who by Trade and Business animate my  
    wealth,  
Which else would be dead and rust in my hands ;  
But when I consider, O Lord, how they come unto thy  
    Temples, fill thy Courts, and sing thy praises,  
O how wonderful they then appear !

What Stars,  
Enflaming Suns,  
Enlarging Seas  
    Of Divine Affection,  
Confirming Paterns,  
Infusing Influence,  
    Do I feel in these !  
Who are the shining light  
Of all the land (to my very Soul :)  
    Wings and Streams  
    Carrying me unto thee,  
The Sea of Goodness from whence they came.”

In this fine passage Traherne sums up almost his whole philosophy, and Whitman's likewise. To both the riches of the world were the men and women in it, and all other riches in comparison with them were dross and poverty. They saw no value in anything save as it ministered to the uses or the pleasures of mankind. The soul to them was no more wonderful than the body, and no more to be reverenced. Traherne, like Whitman, says in effect, though he says it in a very different way :—

“ I do not snivel that snivel the world over  
    That months are vacuums and the ground but wallow  
        and filth.”

And he also said before Whitman, though there are two or three phrases in the lines that he would have modified :—

“ I have said that the soul is not more than the body,  
And I have said that the body is not more than the soul,  
And nothing, not God, is greater to one than one's self is,  
And whoever walks a furlong without sympathy walks to  
    his own funeral drest in his shroud,  
And I or you pocketless of a dime may purchase the pick  
    of the earth,

And to glance with an eye or show a bean in its pod  
 confounds the learning of all times,  
 And there is no trade or employment but the young man  
 following it may become a hero,  
 And there is no object so soft but it makes a hub for the  
 wheel'd universe,  
 And I say to any man or woman, Let your soul stand cool  
 or composed before a million universes."

All that is said in the above passage is to be found, either expressed or implied, in Traherne's poems or in his "Centuries of Meditations." This could easily be shewn by quoting other passages from them ; but it seems scarcely necessary to do so.

Let me take another point on which the two poets are absolutely of one mind. To both of them life was a gift of priceless value ; something to be not merely endured, but to be welcomed, enjoyed, and accounted the greatest of blessings. Thus Traherne says in his own manner :—

" Employment is the very life and ground  
 Of life itself; whose pleasant motion is  
 The form of Bliss :  
 All Blessedness a life with Glory crown'd :  
 Life ! Life is all : in its most full extent  
 Stretcht out to all things, and with all content."

So "Life, mere life" is enough for Whitman, and he finds an almost intoxicating delight in the mere sensation of existence :—

" O to dance, clap hands, exult, shout, skip, leap, roll on,  
 float on !  
 To be a sailor of the world bound for all parts,  
 A ship itself (see indeed these sails I spread to the sun  
 and air),"

expressing thus in middle life the absolute abandon-

ment to joy which is characteristic of children and of the young of most animals. Most of us, I suppose, have at times this sense of joyousness and of exultation in life—but how rarely does it visit us! To how many of us is life either a dreary flat of wearisome dulness, or a heavy burden to be borne upon our shoulders as Sinbad bore the old man of the sea!

This brings me to the last point of resemblance, which I shall now dwell upon, between the English and the American poets. Whitman has been called “A Child-Poet,”\* and though the appellation may at first seem inappropriate or uncharacteristic, a little consideration will show that it is well justified:

“If,” says the writer who so describes him, “the lips of some new-born babe could be opened, its utterances might, we fancy, be something of the nature of what is continually to be met with in Walt Whitman.”

“The child, as he grows older, forgets his early revelations, and though the splendour of them may still, in fitful glimpses, attend him on his way, it is sure to fade back into the shadows as the morning puts off its glory; so that, by the time he has acquired the power of speech, the special property that would have given his words their significance is gone. What constitutes the peculiarity of Walt Whitman is that he kept the vision of his infancy with him through life; it never melted into the light of common day. Is it not a fact that while so much has been said of him, and said in such an ungracious spirit, that many who know nothing of his poetry turn away with a mixture of disgust and impatience at the mere mention of his name, to those who are in any way

\* In an article by Pauline W. Roose, which appeared in *The Gentleman's Magazine*.

attracted to him his image has a charm akin to that of childhood—which imparts an interest out of proportion in some cases with the positive value of his sayings?"

If this is true—as it certainly is—of Whitman, it is even truer of Traherne, and, it may be added, of William Blake also. It was Traherne's one overwhelming desire to recover in later life the freshness of delight in everything about him which characterised his infancy, since then

"A native health and innocence  
Within my bones did grow,  
And while my God did all His glories show  
I felt a vigour in my sense  
That was all Spirit : I within did flow  
With seas of life like wine :  
I nothing in the world did know  
But 'twas Divine."

To Traherne indeed it seemed as evident as it did to Whitman that unless all things are divine nothing is divine. How indeed is it possible for the optimist to escape that conclusion? It is true that neither Traherne nor Whitman could deny, when pressed, that some evils were to be found which it was difficult to reconcile with their faiths; but for these things, so far as they could be brought to consider them at all, they easily found explanations which satisfied themselves, however little they might satisfy other people.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about these essays of Thomson's on Whitman is that they should display such a warm and unstinted admiration for an author with whom it might have been thought that he would have been altogether out of sympathy. If one were asked to name the two

works in English literature which are farthest apart in thought and sentiment, could one respond more fitly than by citing "*Leaves of Grass*," and "*The City of Dreadful Night?*" Not midday, radiant in sunlight and sunshine, and midnight, steeped in starless gloom, differ more completely from one another than do the two poems.\* The one, like the *Poems and Meditations* of Thomas Traherne, is from beginning to end a song of thanksgiving for the great gifts of life and consciousness; the other is a threnody, whose burden is a lament over the countless evils that those gifts have inflicted upon humanity. "*Leaves of Grass*" is the expression of

\* Does this show that one or the other of them must be false to the facts of nature and of life? I think not. The truth of midday differs from the truth of midnight, yet both are equally true. No! that metaphor, like most metaphors, only partially fits the facts. This morning, I saw a smiling landscape rejoicing in the sunshine, and seeming happy in itself, and shedding happiness upon all who viewed it; but soon a furious storm burst over it, and all grew dark and desolate. But the sunshine did not spring from one source and the storm from another; they were both manifestations of the force or energy upon the workings of which the life of the universe depends, and without which it would indeed become a wilderness of what, in the not long-distant pre-scientific days, used to be called dead matter. The volcano which lays waste a countryside or overwhelms a thickly-populated town is perhaps only an indication that the forces of nature have grown somewhat weary of their monotonous daily routine, and are therefore indulging themselves in a little playful diversion. So there are men who, after a long course of perfect sobriety, find it necessary—or at least suppose it to be necessary—to indulge in a season of wild debauchery in order to break the deadly monotony of their existence. Our virtues would themselves become vices, were our vices altogether uprooted.

Schopenhauer's "Will to Live" in its most assertive and triumphant form: in "The City of Dreadful Night" there is the same will, it may be,—but now defeated, wounded, and beaten down. Whitman may be likened to the warrior, who, in Thomson's poem, confronts fearlessly and sword in hand the impassive Sphinx: Thomson to the man who has fallen forward, conquered and crushed, before the same fateful figure.

I suppose the comment of common sense, or of the man of worldly wisdom upon the two poems would be that the error of both authors is that they are alike untrue to the concrete realities of things, and to the general experience of mankind. Life is neither so desirable a thing as Traherne and Whitman represent it to be, nor so utterly undesirable a thing as it seemed to be to Leopardi and Thomson. Well, probably neither Whitman nor Thomson, had they been writing in sober prose, would have gone quite so far as they did in their lyrical ecstacies: but they were poets, and it is not the business of the poet to tell the literal truth about the things he sees, but to heighten, intensify, and transfigure them, so that from dull realities they shall be transformed into creations of imperishable art. In old times the poet was well called a maker: he does not indeed make something out of nothing, but—if he be indeed an authentic poet—he does fashion out of common and almost worthless material

A thing of beauty and a joy for ever.

Nothing was more notable in James Thomson than the catholicity of his taste in literature. Not even

Charles Lamb, who could, we know, enjoy anything in the shape of a book, though he did not account as such those *simulacra* of books which no gentleman's library should be without, had a wider or keener appreciation of all the varieties of good literature. Of course he had his preferences, since the man who, like George Dyer, is without preferences, and to whom one book is as good as another, is obviously an incapable critic—or rather no critic at all. Thomson's sympathies indeed were rather with such writers as Blake, Shelley, Keats, and Heine, than with such others as Scott, Wordsworth, or Tennyson. But whether he liked or disliked an author's message or matter, he was always capable of appraising its literary value justly and impartially: at least I know of no instance in which he did not do this.\* He never made conformity to his own views the measure of his appreciation or admiration. I do not think that he ever failed to do justice to the work of a contemporary writer. It is here indeed that we find the true test of a critic's capacity. To reputations consecrated by time few critics have the courage to declare themselves heretics, however little they may be disposed to fall in with the general opinion. Nor in the case of established reputations is there room for that feeling of envy or jealousy which—unconsciously it may be to themselves—often comes into

\* If anyone here objects that he did in fact praise some favourite authors beyond their deserts, this may, perhaps, be admitted; but I think it will be found that he only did this in his younger days, and not when his powers had reached maturity.

play with regard to contemporaries. Where competition is impossible it is easy to acknowledge superiority; or at least it is easy to see that it is useless to dispute it. But, as human nature is constituted, it is much harder to acknowledge that one is outclassed in merit by an author whose reputation as yet rests only on the insecure foundation of the applause of his own generation. Besides there comes a time in the lives of most men when the mind becomes inaccessible to new ideas, or insensitive to any kind of novel impression. But it is certain that no feelings of this kind ever influenced Thomson, whose mind remained to the last—or at least until the final breakdown of his physical powers—open and alert to receive new ideas, and generously willing to welcome any newcomer in literature of any mark or likelihood. He must have looked with envy indeed at the abounding vitality and the enormous capacity for deriving pleasure from the simplest elements which Whitman possessed; but that did not prevent him from fully appreciating his so much more fortunate brother-poet, or from bestowing the most generous praise upon him.

After all, perhaps, there was not so much difference in the ideas of Whitman and Thomson as there appears to be on the surface. Indeed, if we leave out of account "The City of Dreadful Night," and two or three other poems of Thomson's, we shall find that the two poets had much more in common than we should imagine. In "The Naked Goddess" we have a poem in which Thomson in his own manner enforces the lesson which we find in "Leaves of

Grass"—namely, the lesson that the true wisdom is to follow the methods of nature, living in accordance with her dictates rather than with the false refinements of an artificial civilisation. And there are many expressions in Thomson's verse and prose which furnish hardly less striking parallels to passages in "Leaves of Grass" than those I have already quoted from Traherne and Whitman.

But here I must stop, for I have already much exceeded the limits within which I had intended to confine myself. I seem indeed to be as yet only at the threshold of my subject; but it may be that that is not the view of my readers. Well, if I have wearied them, that, I am willing to confess, must be my own fault, for the fault certainly does not lie in the subject. Only a dull or unintelligent reader could fail to be interested in a subject that bears so close a relation to the problems of human life, and the question of the worth or worthlessness of man's existence. It was, I confess, in order that I might say something upon these matters that I have written this essay; and however little its worth may be, I shall not feel that I have written wholly in vain, since I know that I have derived some good from it myself, however it may be with my readers.

I must say a few words in conclusion as to the author's part of the present booklet. It consists, as the reader will see, of two essays on Whitman, the first of which appeared in *The National Reformer* in 1874, and the second in *Cope's Tobacco Plant* in 1881-2.\* In the second essay some few passages

\* It should perhaps be stated that the second essay is incomplete owing to the fact that the *Tobacco Plant* was dis-

will be found which repeat to some extent what had already been said in the first. It was therefore my first intention to print only the second essay, together with a few passages selected from the first. This, however, on reflection, did not seem to be a satisfactory way of dealing with the matter; and I decided to print both articles in full. Both of them, it will be seen, were written with the avowed object of giving English readers as vivid an idea as possible of Whitman's personality and writings; and therefore they consist largely of quotations from the poet's works, and from other sources. For this reason they scarcely show Thomson at his best as an essayist or critic; but since they form a most eloquent and convincing defence of "the good gray poet," and are highly characteristic also of their author, I think I am doing a good service to readers in rescuing them from their obscurity.

The web of life is weaved of many strands,  
And melancholy here with joy joins hands.

continued after the fifth section of "Walt Whitman" had appeared in it. Two other sections were written, but these unfortunately cannot now be recovered.



# WALT WHITMAN

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## I

As these rough notes are not for the few who know Whitman, but for the many who knowing him not would be the better for knowing him ; are in fact mere notes of introduction, not of critical discussion ; it may serve the convenience of those to whom they are addressed, to indicate at once collectively the materials on which they are based.

First, Whitman's own writings :—“Leaves of Grass,” with the “Passage to India,” constituting his great Poem as finally settled, 500 pp., Washington, 1872 ; “Democratic Vistas,” prose, 84 pp., Washington, 1871 ; “After all not to Create only,” poem, 24 pp., Boston, 1871.

“Notes on Walt Whitman, as Poet and Person,” by John Burroughs ; 2nd edition, New York, 1871. From this valuable little book I have drawn, in many cases simply transcribing, most of the biographical sketch. Let this general acknowledgment stand in lieu of a swarm of quotation marks.

“The Good Gray Poet, a Vindication,” by W. Douglas O'Connor, a pamphlet of 46 pp., New York.

Any of the above can, I suppose, be procured through Trübner & Co., of London.

“A Woman's Estimate of Walt Whitman,” in the *Radical* of Boston, May, 1870. I do not know where or whether this beautiful essay, so eloquent with fervour

and brave sincerity, can now be procured. My own copy I owe to the kindness of Mr. W. M. Rossetti, to whom the piece was originally addressed, and who communicated it to the *Radical*.

“Selections from Leaves of Grass,” edited by W. M. Rossetti, London, 1868. These selections were simply published to pave the way for a complete edition in England. The volume contains an excellent prefatory notice by the editor, and likewise Whitman’s prose Preface to the first edition of the “Leaves of Grass,” which has been omitted from all subsequent editions; and although much of this Preface has been since worked up into the Poems, it remains highly interesting in itself, and I, for one, would be glad to see it reinstated in its integrity.

“Walt Whitman,” by Moncure D. Conway, in the *Fortnightly Review*, October, 1866; especially interesting for the account of a visit which the writer paid to the poet nearly twenty years ago, soon after the appearance of the first edition of “Leaves of Grass.”

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WALT WHITMAN was born May 31st, 1819, in the village of West Hills, on Long Island, about thirty miles from the city of New York. His father’s stock was English; his mother’s half good Dutch, half good sea-faring English. The parents lived on their own farm in rude plenty, having a dozen or fifteen slaves. The father was a large, quiet, serious man, very kind to children and animals; a good citizen, parent, and neighbour. But it seems that the poet’s chief traits come from his mother; and he has often declared that his views of humanity and of womanhood (for which he has an ardent reverence or reverent ardour, as manly as it is rare)

could never have been what they are, if he had not had the practical proof of his mother and other noble women always before him. In his early childhood his parents moved to Brooklyn, then a charming rural town, now much the same in regard to New York as the London of Surrey is to the London of Middlesex. Here his father engaged in house-building and carpentering, and Walt went to a public (or, as we should say, national) school for some years. In 1825 Lafayette (the Lafayette of the American War of Independence and the French Revolutions of 1789 and 1830, the high-toned Cromwell-Grandison of Mirabeau and our Draconic Carlyle) visited Brooklyn in state, and consented to lay the corner-stone of a free public library. The schools were out to greet him, and gentlemen assisted in placing the smaller children in good positions for witnessing the ceremony. Lafayette, also helping the little ones, took up young Walt, and before depositing the child, pressed it a moment to his breast and gave it a kiss. This early chivalrous consecration may have had some slight share in nourishing Whitman's strong love for France.

When thirteen, he went into a printing office and learned to set type. When about sixteen and seventeen, we find him spending his summers in the country and along the sea-board of Long Island, teaching and "boarding round" among the families of his pupils: a primitive mode of existence well known in Scotland and Ireland, as well as in sparse-settled regions of Canada and the States. A short sketch or story sent by him to the

*Democratic Review* having made a hit, he followed it with others, and soon followed it himself, becoming a Bohemian of the Press in New York. He was then a Democrat (*Anglicè*, Whig or Conservative); the Fugitive Slave Law afterwards made him a Republican (*Anglicè*, Liberal or Radical).\*

“Through this period—from 1837 to 1848—without entering into particulars, it is enough to say that he sounded all experiences of life, with all their passions, pleasures and abandonments. He was young, in perfect bodily condition, and had the city of New York and its ample opportunities around him. I trace this period in some of the poems in ‘The Children of Adam,’ and occasionally in other parts of his book, including ‘Calamus.’ Those who have met the poet of late years, and think of him only as the composed and gray-bearded man of the present, must not forget, in reading his ‘Leaves,’ those previous and more ardent stages of his career. Though of Walt Whitman it may be said that he is always young.”

So writes Mr. Burroughs, perhaps too comprehensively, leaving us to expand these brief pregnant formulas of “passions, pleasures and abandonments,” into what unlimited series we please. Of one thing we may be sure, that throughout this period, as ever since, he enjoyed and preferred the society of those who are called the common people. He has gone much with New York bay pilots, fishermen down Long Island, country farmers, city mechanics,

\* [These definitions will scarcely serve now, if they ever did.—ED.]

and especially the Broadway stage or 'bus-drivers. These last, indeed, have adopted him as a particular favourite and chum. He likes to visit wharves, shipyards, foundries, factories ; is fond of public shows and great crowds ; and loves music, having composed much of his poetry in the gallery of the New York Academy, during the opera performances.

"In 1849 he began travelling. Passing down through Pennsylvania and Maryland, he crossed the Alleghanies, went aboard a small trading steamer at Wheeling, and by slow stages, and with many and long stoppages and detours, journeyed along and down the Ohio River. In the same manner, well pleased with Western steamboat life and its scenes, he descended by degrees the Mississippi. In New Orleans he edited a newspaper, and lived there a year, when he again ascended the Mississippi to St. Louis ; moved through that region, explored the Illinois River and the towns along its banks, and lingered some while in Wisconsin and among the great lakes ; stopped north of the Straits of Mackinaw, also at Niagara and in Canada. He saw Western and North-Western nature and character in all their phases, and probably took there and then the decided inspiration of his future poetry."

After some two years, returning to Brooklyn, he again tried his hand at printing. He started a newspaper, first as weekly then as daily. He sold out, and went into business as carpenter and builder (his father's trade) ; worked with his own hands at the rougher work, and built and sold moderate-sized houses.

In 1855, when he was thirty-six years old, after many manuscript doings and undoings, and much matter destroyed, and two or three complete rewritings, the essential foundation of "Leaves of Grass" was laid, and part of the superstructure raised, in the piece called "Walt Whitman," and some nine or ten smaller pieces, forming the thin quarto or first edition.

In '56 or '57 appeared a second edition, containing several new pieces, and also a letter of enthusiastic praise from Emerson, then as now the supreme literary authority of the States (which letter I shall have to quote at length further on), and an answer thereto from Whitman; neither of these is given in the last edition. The most notable addition to the poems was the piece beginning "A Woman Waits for Me." It is said that there prevail in the United States, and especially "down East" in those of New England, a timorous prudery more or less prurient, and a cant of indelicate delicacy, exceeding if possible the prudery and the cant of our Old England; and these were of course horribly confounded and outraged by this and other poems in the "Children of Adam" series, which chanted with the most audacious freedom and fervour the glory of the body, and the nobleness of sex and sexual relations.

[Mr. O'Connor gives us an almost incredible instance of this prurient prudery, of which he was an eye-witness. In one of the military hospitals at Washington, a patient, rolling and writhing in his agony, chanced to thrust forth "a manly leg" from under the bed-clothes: whereon the lady

nurse scuddled away out of the room, scared and with face on fire. What would Florence Nightingale and her noble sisters in the Crimea have said to such a creature?]

A storm had been muttering before, but at the publication of this piece it burst forth in fullest fury. Every epithet of rancour and opprobrium was showered upon the book and author. Mr. Conway tells us that even Emerson was much annoyed in consequence of his unreserved commendation of the first issue. I hope that Emerson's philosophy was strong enough to bear all such consequences without much annoyance; if not, it must be of a very delicate constitution, poor thing, like most philosophies of the study.

## II

About this time Mr. Conway paid his visit; and I proceed to condense from his record. Whitman was then living with his mother, a fine old lady, in the last house from town (New York), a two-storey wooden building. The visitor found him on the central hillock, without tree or shelter, of an open common, lying on his back and gazing up at the blazing midsummer mid-day sun, which was by no means too fierce for him; though the thermometer, we are told, stood at nearly 100 degrees, and this, for a New York midsummer noon, must mean in the shade, I suppose. He lay thus, not very distinguishable from the soil, in grey clothing, blue-grey shirt, with iron-gray hair,

swart sunburnt face and bare neck, on the brown and white grass. His school education was of the common English sort ; the books he chiefly read were the Bible, Homer, and Shakspere, and these he probably had in his pockets. His favourite reading-places were the top of a 'bus and Coney Island, a small sand-heap, then quite uninhabited ; his favourite place for meditation and composition was the bare hillock on the lonely common. Though so free as to himself in writing, he was inclined to be taciturn on the subject in talk. He had learned all he knew from stage-drivers, pilots of ferry boats (the large steam ferry boats), fishermen, boatmen, men and women of markets and wharves. He told how he had spoken with Henry Ward Beecher, whom he liked ; but Beecher having acknowledged, when questioned, that he was shocked by the oaths of the streets, Walt concluded that he would stick to the company of his rough, swearing friends, who had no shibboleths of respectability. In his youth he had listened to the great Quaker iconoclast, Elias Hicks ; his maternal grandmother was a Quakeress ; and the impress of the Friends (who seemed to have attained a far nobler character in America than they possess now in the Old Country) is here and there traceable in his writings. He spoke of his farm work, how he had taught school, been a carpenter, a builder of frame houses, a printer, having himself set up his first book in type. He confessed (and here my sympathy is too intense for words) that he had no talent for industry, that his forte consisted in loafing and writing poems.

He was very poor, but had discovered that he could on the whole live magnificently on bread and water. They spent the rest of the day loafing on Staten Island, where there was shade with miles of fine beach. They bathed ; and Mr. Conway, like every one else who had seen the poet, celebrates his magnificent *physique*, full of health and vigour, beauty and grace. Strolling in New York, he was continually met by lower class acquaintances, who grasped his hands with enthusiasm, and laughed and chatted. He laughed not, nor even smiled. A workman in corduroys, privately interrogated, said, Nobody knows Walt but likes him ; nearly everybody knows him, and—loves him. None of the people knew anything about his authorship ; it was simply the man himself they idolised. Visiting the Tombs prison, the prisoners ran to tell him their grievances. Concerning one case he confronted the Governor, and said with deliberate emphasis, "in my opinion it is a damned shame" ; and, after a duel of eye-shots, the official quailed. Mr. Conway, with some reason, thinks that emphatic oath one of the most pious utterances he has ever heard. Whitman's room was almost bare, with one window, which overlooked the barren solitudes of the Island ; there were two prints, a Bacchus and a Silenus, but no books. As soon as he had attained clear conception of his mission, to be the poet of democracy, the first truly national singer of America, "the teeming nation of nations," he wrote on a sheet of paper in large letters, "MAKE THE WORK," and fixed it above his table where he could always see it when writing. Mr. Conway

bears testimony in his own case to another supreme characteristic of Whitman, always abundantly exemplified; his marvellous personal influence, his intense and puissant magnetism; "He had so magnetised me, so charged me with something indefinable, that for the time the only wise course of life seemed to be to put on blue shirt and blouse, and loaf about Manahatta and Paumonok (New York and Long Island)."

Henry Thoreau, the poetic naturalist and orientalist (the man, I presume, celebrated by Emerson in the first part of his "Wood Notes," and elsewhere), visited him in '56, and wrote, "That Walt Whitman is the most interesting fact to me at present. Wonderfully like the orientals, too. He is apparently the greatest democrat the world has seen." And again, "He is democracy." And, finally, "After all he suggests something a little more than human."

In the spring and early summer of '60 he was at Boston, reading the proofs for a third edition of his poems; and he afterwards spoke of this visit as one of the pleasantest reminiscences of his life.

The Great War was now to prove and reveal the character of Whitman in all the grandeur of its strength and tenderness; a genuine grandeur which perhaps never has been, perhaps never will be, surpassed by noblest man or woman. Soon after the struggle began, he went to the front, making himself practically useful among the wounded, and supported himself by corresponding with northern newspapers, especially the *New York Times*, then

under the management of Raymond, a really excellent journal. Mr. Rossetti has been informed that he obtained the sanction of Lincoln for this work of charity through the intervention of Emerson, with authority to draw the ordinary army rations; Whitman himself stipulating that he should have no pay. Mr. O'Connor notes how, when so many were skulking from the call to arms, Whitman, who might easily have evaded, as appearing so much older than he was through having grown grey when quite young, took care to have his name duly inscribed on the roll for service. But no stress should be laid on this; seeing that throughout the war, and for I know not how many years after its conclusion, but we may be sure even until now if occasion still requires, he voluntarily devoted himself to a duty demanding a hundred-fold more courage and endurance, not to speak of love and truly divine compassion, than can any mere hot-blooded fighting. From his letters while with the army, Mr. Burroughs gives a few extracts, too few and too short. They are above all impressive by the stern self-restraint and concision of their tenderness; the poet whose songs had been shouts of jubilation, mighty and tumultuous as the voice of many waters, has now only the most quiet and simple words for the abounding agonies he witnesses and tends; it is clear that if once he let loose his feelings from under stoical control, they would utterly overwhelm and disable him. I hope yet to see published a liberal selection from these letters.

He joined the army just after the battle of

Fredericksburgh, in which his brother Lieut.-Col. George Whitman, of the 51st New York Veterans, had been hit in the face by a piece of shell. Remaining at the front through the winter of '62-63, he then returned to Washington, where the sick and wounded had been chiefly concentrated; and which in "those years was a city in whose unbuilt places and around whose borders were thickly-planted dense white clusters of hospital barracks"; or in the words of Burroughs, The Capitol City was then one huge hospital. Mr. O'Connor says: "Few know the spectacle presented by those grim wards. It was hideous. I have been there at night when it seemed that I should die with sympathy if I stayed." The winter of '63-64 he spent with the army at Brandy Station and Culpepper, Virginia, working in the brigade and division hospitals. The following summer brought the "bloody holocaust" of the wilderness; and Whitman at length succumbed for a time to the first illness of his life. He was worn out with watching and tending assiduously night and day to the poor fellows, "whose wounds from previous enforced neglect, and the intense heat of the weather, were mortified, and several corrupted with worms"; and his system became deeply saturated with the worst poison of hospital malaria. He was ordered North, where he lay ill for six months; and the illness left permanent effects.

## III

In February, 1865, wishing to return to his voluntary pious service, he procured a clerkship in the Department of the Interior, which gave him leisure for hospital visits and secured him an income. He did his clerical work well, and was promoted. Then came a new secretary, a certain very Hon. James Harlan, who suddenly dismissed him from his situation, with "circumstances far more brutal and infamous than is generally known," answering remonstrances with the words: If the President himself directed me to put the Author of "Leaves of Grass" back in his place, I would resign sooner than do it. This dismissal aroused a good deal of indignation throughout the country, and gave birth to Mr. O'Connor's "Vindication," which is a vehement polemic to show that on the principles of the Hon. Harlan all the great literature and art of the world must be ostracised, and an eloquent tribute to the nobleness of Whitman's character. The poet was soon afterwards sent for by a distinguished Cabinet officer, who offered him a place of moderate pay, but honourable position, in the Attorney-General's department. This he accepted, and has continued to occupy; though in this also, we are informed, he was at one time subjected to trains of dastardly official insolence from one of the sublimer dignitaries, which nearly drove him from it.

Through all his troubles with men who, drest

in a little brief authority, play such fantastic tricks before high heaven, Whitman regularly and most earnestly fulfilled the duties of that post to which he had appointed himself, and whose pay drew no greenbacks from the Treasury. Long after the intense excitement of the War was over, when the sick and wounded of that terrible struggle began to be forgotten save by their near kindred and their hired attendants, he continued his sacred ministrations. Every Sunday, writes Burroughs in March, 1867, finds him at the hospitals, and he frequently goes there during the week. From the beginning he tended all alike, Northerner and Southerner, black and white. His principles of operation, though so effective, seemed strangely few, simple, and on a low key. When possible he always went prepared as for a festival, after a good meal, rest, bath, change of underclothing, with a flower or green sprig in his coat, and with great bunches of flowers or greenery. He entered with a huge haversack slung over his shoulder, full of appropriate articles, with parcels under his arm, and protuberant pockets. He would sometimes come in summer with a good-sized basket, filled with oranges, and would go round for hours paring and dividing them among the feverish and thirsty. His entrance into any ward was the signal for manifestations of the utmost delight. "His magnetism was incredible and exhaustless. It is no figure of speech, but a fact deeper than speech. The lustreless eye brightened up at his approach; his commonplace words invigorated; a bracing air seemed to fill the ward, and neutralise the bad

smells. I beheld in practical force something like that fervid incantation of one of his own poems :—

“ ‘ To any one dying—thither I speed, and twist the knob of the door ;

Turn the bedclothes toward the foot of the bed ;

Let the physician and priest go home.

I seize the descending man, and raise him with resistless will.

O desparer, here is my neck ;

By God ! you shall not go down ! Hang your whole weight upon me.

I dilate you with tremendous breath—I buoy you up ;

Every room of the house do I fill with an arm’d force,

Lovers of me, bafflers of graves.

Sleep ! I and they keep guard all night ;

Not doubt—not decease shall dare to lay finger upon you ;

I have embraced you, and henceforth possess you to myself.

And when you rise in the morning you will find what I tell you is so.”

Let him speak for himself of his hospital experiences in two or three short extracts from letters :—

“ Am among the regimental, brigade, and division hospitals somewhat. Few at home realise that these are merely tents, and sometimes very poor ones, the wounded lying on the ground, lucky if their blanket is spread on a layer of pine or hemlock twigs, or some leaves. No cots ; seldom even a mattress on the ground. It is pretty cold (being Christmas time). I go around from one case to another. I do not see that I can do any good ; but I cannot leave them. Once in a while some youngster holds on to me convulsively, and I do what I can for him ; at any rate, stop with him and sit near him for hours if he wishes it.”

“ My custom is to go through a ward, or collection of wards, endeavouring to give some trifle to each, without missing any. Even a sweet biscuit, a sheet of paper, or a passing word of friendliness, or but a look or nod, if no

more. In this way I go among large numbers without delaying, yet do not hurry. I find out the general mood of the ward at the time; sometimes see that there is a heavy weight of listlessness prevailing, and the whole ward wants cheering up. I perhaps read to the men, to break the spell calling them around me, careful to sit away from the cot of any one who is very bad with sickness or wounds. Also, I find out, by going through in this way, the cases that need special attention, and can then devote proper time to them . . . . I buy, during the hot weather, boxes of oranges from time to time, and distribute them among the men; also preserved peaches and other fruits; also lemons and sugar, for lemonade. Tobacco is also much in demand. Large numbers of the men come up, as usual, without a cent of money. Through the assistance of friends in Brooklyn and Boston, I am again able to help many of those that fall in my way. It is only a small sum in each case, but it is much to them. As before, I go a round daily and talk with the men to cheer them up."

"I do a good deal of letter-writing, writing all kinds, including love-letters. Many sick and wounded soldiers have not written home to parents, brothers, sisters, and even wives, for one reason or another, for a long, long time. Some are poor writers, some cannot get paper and envelopes; many have an aversion to writing, because they dread to worry the folks at home—the facts about them are so sad to tell. I always encourage the men to write, and promptly write for them."

"This afternoon, July 22, 1863, I spent a long time with a young man I have been with a good deal from time to time, named Oscar F. Wilber, Company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhoea, and a bad wound also. He asked me to read him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and asked him what I should read. He said: Make your own choice. I opened at the close of one of the first books of the Evangelists,

and read the chapters describing the latter hours of Christ and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man asked me to read the following chapter also, how Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleased him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He asked me if I enjoyed religion. I said : Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean ; and yet maybe it is the same thing. He said : It is my chief reliance. He talked of death, and said he did not fear it. I said : Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well ? He said : I may, but it is not probable. He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad ; it discharged much. Then the diarrhoea had prostrated him, and I felt that he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he returned fourfold."

I cannot more fitly conclude these quotations than in the words of Mr. Burroughs :

"I would say to the reader that I have dwelt upon this portion of Walt Whitman's life, not so much because it enters into the statement of his biography, as because it really enters into the statement of his poetry, and affords a light through which alone the later pieces, and in some sort the whole of his work, can be fitly construed. His large oceanic nature doubtless enjoyed fully, and grew all the larger from, the pouring out of its powerful currents of magnetism ; and this is evident in his pieces since 1861.

"The statement is also needed with reference to the country, for it rises to national proportions. To more than a hundred thousand suffering soldiers was he, during the war, personally the cheering visitor, and ministered in some form to their direct needs of body and spirit ; soldiers from every quarter—west, east, north, south, for he treated the rebel wounded the same as the rest.

"Of course there were plenty of others, men and women, who engaged faithfully in the same service. But it is probable that no other was so endowed for it as Walt Whitman. I should say his whole character culminates here ; and, as a country is best viewed by ascending some peak, so from this point his life and book are to be read and understood."

## IV

I am aware that the admirers of Walt Whitman have been often sneered at for dwelling so much on the magnificence of his physique. "We will take for granted," say the sneerers, "that he is a man ; prove to us that he is a poet." But I venture to think that a man perfect in the body, stalwart and beautiful, vigorous and healthy, sensitive in every nerve and fibre, is so rare that he well deserves celebration for the body alone. And when this splendid body is informed by a mighty brain, and a yet mightier heart, and a personality so potent that it irresistibly fascinates his fellow-men by myriads, the man is so phenomenal that all who have the privilege of knowing him may well celebrate him again and again in every aspect, and run little risk of putting too much enthusiasm into their pages. For how many such men are to be found in history? In our own for the last century we can perhaps cite only Robert Burns ; and he perished in misery at thirty-seven. The greater part of our noblest modern poetic genius have been shrined in disease or deformity ;

Shelley never had good health, Keats died of consumption at twenty-four, Byron and Scott were lame, Schiller with difficulty kept alive till forty-six, Heine lay helpless in paralysis seven years before his death, Lenau died young in a mad-house, Alfred de Musset was an old man at forty, Leopardi was irretrievably shattered at twenty ; and I, for one, cannot remember these, with others only less illustrious, and yet contemplate without joy and admiration a supreme poet supremely embodied. I therefore make no apology for inserting here a few lines from some of those newspaper portraitures in which Americans often excel, and perhaps more often exceed. And I insert them the more willingly because some very wild and distorted fancy caricatures of Whitman have been extensively circulated ; and because it appears that, since he stood forth fully revealed in the great and terrible conflagration of the War, even free and easy American journalists gaze upon him with some of that spirit of simple reverence in which the noble Arab quoted by Emanuel Deutsch gazed on Mahomed : "I saw him in a moonlight night, and sometimes I looked at his beauty, and sometimes I looked at the moon, and his dress was striped with red, and he was brighter and more beautiful to me than the moon."

One writing in 1868 says :

"I present Walt Whitman, then, as a man now well in his forty-ninth year, tall and strongly built, with a profuse grey beard, which at first sight gives him an older appearance ; of slow movement and erect figure ; of manners always simple, full of cheer and courtesy ;

a moderate talker, and, contrary to the general opinion, free from eccentricity. The portraits and photographs in existence fail in giving the real life-expression. His serene grey eyes, and the copiousness of hair, moustache, eyebrows, and beard, affording ample silvery fringe to his face of faint scarlet, make up a large part of its individuality. I have heard physiognomists say that no face could contain more alertness, combined with more calmness ; and he has occasionally, in repose, a look I once heard of in a description of him as a man 'wandering out of himself, and roaming silently over the whole earth.'"

Another in May, 1869, writes :

"You will meet, moving along at a firm but moderate pace [as if breasting or blown by a strong, slow wind, says yet another], a robust figure, six feet high, costumed in blue or grey, with drab hat, broad shirt collar, grey-white beard, full and curly, face like a red apple, blue eyes, and a look of animal health more indicative of hunting or boating than the department office or author's desk."

It will be noticed that the writers differ as to the colour of the eyes, the one calling them grey, the other blue. Mr. Conway terms them light blue; Whitman himself terms them grey. They are probably grey in some lights and moods, and blue in others.

In a letter from Washington, Nov. 28th, 1870, we read :

"While in the market the other day with a party of us, we were all weighed ; his weight was 200 lbs. He is fond of the sun, and at this season, soon as it is well up shining in his room, he is out in its beams for a cold-water bath, with hand and sponge, after

a brisk use of the flesh-brush. Then blithely singing—his singing often pleasantly wakes me—he proceeds to finish his toilet, about which he is quite particular. Then forth for a walk in the open air, or perhaps some short exercise in the gymnasium. Then to breakfast—no sipping and nibbling; he demolishes meat, eggs, rolls, toast, roast potatoes, coffee, buckwheat cakes, at a terrible rate. Then walking moderately to his desk in the Attorney-General's office, a pleasant desk with large south window at his left, looking away down the Potomac, and across to Virginia on one side . . . . He is not what you call ceremonious or polite, but, I have noticed, invariably kind and tolerant with children, servants, labourers, and the illiterate. He gives freely to the poor, according to his means. He can be freezing in manner, and knows how to fend off bores, though really the most affectionate of men. For instance, I saw him—I was with him—the other day, meeting at the railroad dépôt (*Anglice*, railway station), after long separation, a family group, to all the members of which he was attached through the tenderest former associations, and some he had known from boyhood, interchanging great hearty kisses with each, the boys and men as well as the girls and women."

Another letter, of nearly the same date, says :

"His figure is daily to be seen moving around in the open air, especially on fine mornings and evenings; observing, listening to, or sociably talking with, all sorts of people—policemen, drivers, market men, old women, the blacks, or dignitaries; or, perhaps, giving some small alms to beggars, the maimed, or organ-grinders; or stopping to caress little children, of whom he is very fond. . . . Walt Whitman is now in his fifty-second year, hearty and blooming, tall, with white beard and long hair. The older he gets the more cheerful and gay-hearted he becomes."

And, lastly, one who saw and heard him, in September, 1871, in the American Institute, New York, while the Exhibition was yet unready, in a huge barn-like building crammed with unarranged goods and machinery, with a thousand men actively at work, reciting his poem, "After all not to create only," to an audience of two or three thousand people, with a fringe of five or six hundred partially hushed workmen, writes: "He did not mind the distant noises and the litter and machinery, but doubtless rather enjoyed them . . . . His voice is magnificent, and is to be mentioned with Nature's ocean's and the music of forests and hills."

## V

Knowing now a little about the man, we may give a brief space to the consideration of his poetry. I do not mean to criticise this; it will be soon enough to criticise when its influence has become excessive, and when weak imitators, as is their wont, are afflicting us with exaggerations of its least admirable traits: at present the need is to make it generally known. I can scarcely do better in the way of bespeaking attention to it, than quote the letter, already alluded to, from Emerson to Whitman, on receiving a copy of the first edition of "Leaves of Grass":—

"Concord, Mass., July 21, 1855.

"DEAR SIR,—I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of 'Leaves of Grass.' I find it the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that

America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our Western wits fat and mean.

"I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

"I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion ; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits ; namely, of fortifying and encouraging.

"I did not know, until I last night saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

"R. W. EMERSON."

On the other hand, Mr. Emerson is reported as saying, in a lecture delivered January, 1871, "Walt Whitman in his first efforts gave very high promise, but he has not fulfilled it since." Certainly he has not fulfilled it as a mature man may fulfil the promise of his early youth ; but when he started thus magnificently in public he was already mature, "with a long foreground," as Emerson justly divined ; being in fact thirty-six years old, as he tells us himself, when commencing the work. But, with all due deference to Emerson, while admitting the perhaps not-to-be-equalled freshness of

the original outburst, I cannot but think the mass of the later pieces quite worthy of the firstlings of his prime; and no richer fulfilment of a promise which itself was ripe performance could fairly be looked for.

Mr. O'Connor puts clearly what distinguishes the work of Whitman from the works of such of his countrymen as hold a legitimate rank in literature, even from those of Emerson himself, which, by-the-bye, Whitman had not read when he first produced the "Leaves of Grass"; and which are as olives from the grove of Academe transplanted to New England, and by rare geniality of temperament, with fortunate conditions and assiduous culture, producing richest fruit and oil in that harsher clime: "It is, in the first place, a work purely and entirely American, autochthonic, sprung from our own soil; no savour of Europe nor of the past, nor of any other literature in it; a vast carol of our own land, and of its Present and Future; the strong and haughty psalm of the Republic. There is not one other book, I care not whose, of which this can be said." And in the same spirit Mr. Rossetti writes: "Walt Whitman occupies at the present moment a unique position on the globe. He is the one man who entertains and professes respecting himself the grave conviction that he is the actual and prospective founder of a new poetic literature, and a great one—a literature proportional to the material vastness and unmeasured destinies of America."

Acknowledging with love and reverence the Past as the parent of the Present; acknowledging

cordially the priceless value of the great poems of other ages and lands, true to their ages and lands; Whitman demands for his own America now and to-come, poems equally true to their birthplace and birth-time; and he sets himself to chant the earliest songs of enfranchisement. From the Preface to the first edition we may find what were the leading views of this man, whose common English schooling ended when he was about thirteen, and who learned all he knew of life from pilots and 'bus-drivers, and men and women of the wharves and markets. First as to style, it is not a little strange to find that he is penetrated with one of the inmost secrets, if not the very inmost secret, of the profoundest masters:

"The art of art, the glory of expression, and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity--nothing can make up for excess, or for the lack of definiteness. . . . To speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and *insouciance* of the movements of animals, and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside, is the flawless triumph of art. . . . The greatest poet has less a marked style, and is more the channel of thoughts and things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance, or effect, or originality, to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in my way, not the richest curtains. What I tell, I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle, fascinate or soothe, I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has, and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition."

Here are a few more samples from this Preface:

"The whole theory of the special and supernatural, and all that was twined with it or educed out of it, departs as a dream."

"It is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women."

"The attitude of great poets is to cheer up slaves and horrify despots."

"There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile—perhaps a generation or two—dropping off by degrees. A superior breed shall take their place. A new order shall arise; and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest."

And, peculiarly characteristic of his own nature and poetry: "The soul has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride, and the one balances the other, and neither can stretch too far while it stretches in company with the other."

With such measureless pride, as of Marlowe's Tamburlaine the Great, he announces himself from the first in his poem:

"Walt Whitman am I, a Kosmos, of mighty Manhattan the son,  
Turbulent, fleshy and sensual, eating, drinking and breeding,  
No sentimentalist—no stander above men and women, or  
apart from them;  
No more modest than immodest.

---

"I speak the password primeval—I give the sign of democracy ;

By God ! I will accept nothing that all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms.

---

"Through me many long dumb voices ;

Voices of the interminable generations of slaves ;

Voices of prostitutes, and of deform'd persons ;

Voices of the diseas'd and despairing, and of thieves and dwarfs.

"Through me forbidden voices ;

Voices of sexes and lusts—voices veil'd and I remove the veil ;

Voices indecent, by me clarified and transfigur'd.

---

"I do not press my fingers across my mouth ;

I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart ;

Copulation is no more rank to me than death is.

"I believe in the flesh and the appetites ;

Seeing, hearing, feeling, are miracles, and each part and tag of me is a miracle.

"Divine am I inside and out, and I make holy whatever I touch or am touch'd from ;

The scent of these arm-pits aroma finer than prayer ;

This head more than churches, bibles, and all the creeds.

---

"I am not the poet of goodness only—

I do not decline to be the poet of wickedness also.

"What blurt is this about virtue and about vice ?

Evil propels me, and reform of evils propels me—I stand indifferent.

---

"I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain'd ;

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition ;

They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins ;  
They do not make me sick dicussing their duty to God ;  
Not one is dissatisfied—not one is demented with the mania  
of owning things ;  
Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived  
thousands of years ago ;  
Not one is respectable or industrious over the whole earth."

## VI

Intoxicated with a multiplex audacity ; of his own manhood in the untainted vigour of its prime, of boundless self-reliance and sympathy as boundless, of the mighty youth and unprescribed destinies of his country ; there is a roaring exultation in the voice of his earlier songs, which may well shock delicate old-world ears. It is not, as none knows better than himself, a voice for drawing-rooms ; it is for the open air, for the great prairies and the pinewoods, the great rivers and the mountains, the great lakes and the sea. Resolute to exclude nothing from his song, rhymed verses and the common uniform metres are too straight for him ; he uses long irregular unrhymed lines, restrained only by a "majestic sense of rhythm," rolling in one upon another weighty and sounding and tumultuous as the rolling waves of the sea. Sometimes we hear the balanced antiphonal clauses, the solemn closing cadences, of the grand Biblical poems ; more frequently the rhythm is less regular, the rushing energy of the poet prolonging and swaying his tones beyond all symmetrical boundaries. Heine, but within much stricter limits, has

adopted such measures for the two cycles of North Sea chants, obeying an artistic impulse to make his voice consonant with the wild voices of his theme. In his later poems Blake has used just such measures, the upstirred soul of him heaving and foaming like a storm-tossed main. Indeed, Mr. Swinburne, in concluding his Essay on that poet, draws a somewhat elaborate comparison between him and Whitman, seeing much closer resemblance (almost amounting to identity) between them than I have been able to discover; for Blake never grasps or cares for the common world of reality, Whitman never loosens his embrace of it. To my mind, Burns in the same circumstances would have been much more like Whitman than would Blake. But Whitman gives no signs of the glorious humor of Burns, or of the wonderful lyrical faculty of either; on the rare occasions when he uses rhyme, he shows little facility or felicity in it. To quote him piecemeal is to give buckets of brine, or at most wavelets, as representative of the ocean. For his nature has an oceanic amplitude and depth, its power and glory are in its immensity; nothing less than a shoreless horizon-ring can contain enough to give a true idea thereof. He sings himself with long-unequalled arrogance (Poetry is arrogance, *Dichten ist ein Uebermuth*, chanted brave old Göthe in the *Divan*), but himself as the average man, claiming nothing personally which shall not be conceded to every human being:

“I have claim’d nothing to myself which I have not carefully claim’d for others on the same terms.”

He burns with such sympathy and brotherhood for all, high and low, rich and poor, noble and vile, thief, drunkard, and prostitute with the rest, that its intense expression would almost seem incredible did we not know how he has proved it in life. He chants evil and good alike, or rather acknowledges them alike, feeling that everything which has the vitality to exist has therein the right to exist; he cannot indeed bring himself to allow that there is any real evil:

“And I say there is in fact no evil;  
(Or if there is, I say it is just as important to you, to the land, or to me, as anything else.)”

Wonderfully like the Orientals, as Thoreau noted, though of these he had read nothing; and wonderfully like that profound Oriental genius, Spinoza, with whom also he is at one in the doctrine, directly antagonistic to Christianity, that the soul passes by joy, not by sorrow, to a higher perfection. He sings his complete self, body and soul, the one not less than the other, the one in truth undistinguishable from the other; sings freely and proudly every portion and function of his body, ashamed of none, feeling all equally divine:

“Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean;  
Not an inch, nor a particle of an inch, is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest.”

He sings sex and the raptures and mysteries of sex, always with ardor, never ignobly; revering woman, and looking to her ever to become the perfect mother of perfect children. As remarked before, an immense pother has been raised over

the phallic "Children of Adam" series by pietists suckled on the wretched dogma that Nature is essentially obscene. Fortunately there is no need to vindicate them in these pages; our readers are not enslaved by that false and noxious Christian asceticism which has for so many centuries starved and defiled, abased and cursed the mortal body it knew, in favour of an immortal spirit of which it knew nothing. Very tenderly and nobly has the author of the "Woman's Estimate," "who has been a happy wife and mother," discussed this theme. It is rightly treated, also, in an article on our poet in the *Westminster Review* for July, 1871, of which one sentence may here suffice: "Whitman's most naked physical descriptions and enumerations are those of a robust, vigorous, clean man, enamoured of living, unashamed of body as he is unashamed of soul, absolutely free from pruriency of imagination, absolutely inexperienced in the artificial excitements and enhancements of jaded lusts." He sings in the great section termed "Calamus," as it has scarcely been sung before, the perfect love of comrades, the superb friendship of man and man, deep as life, stronger than death. His genius expatiating over all his vast country, he sings it, north and south, east and west; revelling in long enumerations (often each item a distinct and glowing picture) of its lands, its rivers, its cities, its various occupations, which pass as in many-coloured processions that will never end, till the mind is bewildered with beholding them. In the words of Mr. Conway: "He notes everything, forgets nothing. His brain is indeed a kind of

American formation, in which all things print themselves like fern in coal." I know but one other living American writer who approaches him in his sympathy with all ordinary life and vulgar occupations, in his feeling of brotherhood for all rough workers, and at the same time in his sense of beauty and grandeur, and his power of thought ; I mean Herman Melville, the author of "Typee," "Omoo," "Mardi," "The Whale," etc. ; but Melville is sometimes strangely unequal to his better self, and has lavished much strength in desultory doings ; while Whitman has concentrated himself from the beginning on one great strenuous endeavour, with energies reinforced and multiplied by the zeal and enthusiasm of the consciousness of a mission. Above all the rest, if preference there be, his heart leaps with exultation at the vision of the great West, and his voice never swells more proudly than when singing the ever-advancing armies of the West ; the earth-subduers, deploying by scores, by hundreds, by thousands, from the rising to the setting sun, from the Alleghanies to the Rocky Mountains, and over these to the Pacific ; large-natured with daring and endurance, strong and haughty, wild and generous ; the "resistless, restless race" of his *Pioneers ! O Pioneers !*

## VII

He sings the "Song of the Open Road," which every man must tread who would not remain dungeoned in stark old conventions, the road leading none knows whither, save that it leads to freedom and self-reliance; nor has he who urges his comrade, his "dear camerado" to travel it, the least notion whether they shall be victorious or utterly quelled and defeated. Loving to term the ideal poet a Kosmos, he flings himself into all realms of nature, he re-incarnates himself in men and women of all sorts and conditions. He sings with boundless elation the cities of his nurture, New York and Brooklyn; the superb Manahatta, planted on her fish-shaped island, with the North River and the East River and the ocean flashing around her busy wharves; the great cosmopolitan city with her fierce teeming passionate life, her industries, her splendours, and her crimes: well should she love him, for well he loves her. He sings the Union and Democracy and "Libertad" with a fervour as if his lips were touched with fire; and he sings the songs of "Insurrection," chiefly for Europe, but also if necessary for the States:

"To the States, or any one of them, or any city of The States, *Resist much, obey little*;  
Once unquestioning obedience, once fully enslaved;  
Once fully enslaved, no nation, state, city, of this earth,  
ever afterwards resumes its liberty."

When the great war bursts out he begins to sing it with martial ardour, but soon his voice breaks and his reveillé "Drum Taps" are lost in the groans of the wounded, the diseased and the dying. He sings not the generals and the strategy (these indeed seldom deserved singing); he sings the nameless volunteers, the mechanics and clerks and artisans of New York and the other great cities, "the young salting from bleak Cape Cod, the Philadelphia machinist, the farmer's son of Michigan or Illinois or Ohio," who were the real Northern heroes of the war, and who died by myriads in accomplishing its ends. The Union for him, as for so many other Northerners, is sacred, fetish; a fact and a principle beyond all argument, above all common laws of right and wrong, decreed to endure for ever by immutable Destiny; he cannot conceive its disruption; he feels even when the contest is fiercest that the men of the South are his compatriots and brothers no less than the men of the North, and there is no rancour against the former in his heart-stricken sympathy with the latter. Only two or three times does a word of bitterness escape him; and there is no more beautiful piece in the series of "Drum Taps" than the few lines entitled "Reconciliation":

"Word over all, beautiful as the sky !  
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost ;  
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly softly wash again and ever again this soil'd world : . . . For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is dead ;

I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—  
I draw near;  
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white  
face in the coffin."

All these and many other wonderful chants, wonderful for power, grandeur, courage, sincerity, veracity, all-embracing sympathy, seem less works of art than immediate outgrowths of nature; art and profound art there must have been in the selection and shaping and wording of the visions, but this art is latent; compared with most other poems his read as improvisations, or, to use the fine and finely wrought-out comparison of the lady of the "Estimate," they resemble a forest, whereas most others resemble a palace or cathedral, so vital and spontaneous are they. In his own words:—

"Camerado! this is no book;  
Who touches this, touches a man."

But there is one supreme and significant exception to this general rule. We are told that in the winter of '64, Abraham Lincoln, looking out of the White House at Washington, saw Whitman strolling by and asked who he was. Being told by a bystander, he took a good look, until the poet was quite gone past. "Then he said (I can't give his way of saying it, but it was quite emphatic and odd), 'Well, *he* looks like a MAN.'" Lincoln, it seems, became his warm friend and admirer; while he in his turn formed for Lincoln a deep personal attachment, regarding him as by far the noblest and purest of the political characters of the time; and likewise as a sort of representative

historical American. We may readily believe, then, that the assassination of the President made a profoundly painful impression on the poet. He chanted "President Lincoln's Funeral Hymn," a requiem of such solemn and lofty beauty that I fear not to set it beside the "Adonais" of Shelley; and moreover a work of such subtile and consummate and suggestive art, that I know nothing fitter with which to compare it than a grand impassioned sonata or symphony of Beethoven. It is "grief wound up to a mysteriousness;" uplifted by the very intensity of its passion into serene trance. Although a few of its words may be questionable, it is, so far as I am aware and can judge, in all great qualities conjoined of thought, imagination, emotion, language, decidedly the best and noblest piece of art in literature which America has yet produced. I dare not mutilate it, but will gladly transcribe the whole if the Editor can spare the requisite space of three or four columns.

I need not say much here of Walt Whitman's opinions in religion or philosophy; it is his character which makes such a man interesting, not his opinions. These he may find floating in the air; they are not the most vital and spontaneous and necessary outcome of his nature. He celebrates above all other things Religion, but it is a religion without God (though it often uses His name), and without any creed or with all creeds indifferently, "Taking them all for what they are worth, and not a cent more":

"What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God? And that there is no God any more divine than Yourself?"

And again :

“ Not objecting to special revelations—considering a curl of smoke, or a hair on the back of my hand, just as curious as any revelation.”

And he addresses “ Him that was crucified ” :

“ My spirit to yours, dear brother ;  
I specify you with joy, O my comrade, to salute you, and  
to salute those who are with you, before and since—and  
those to come also,  
That we all labour together, transmitting the same charge  
and succession ;  
We few, equals, indifferent of lands, indifferent of times ;  
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes—allowers of all  
theologies,  
Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men.”

His Religion, in fact, means simply the cultivation of truth and nobleness and human fellowship, and has nothing to do with dogmas. He is deeply convinced of the Immortality of the human Soul, perhaps because his own intense vitality renders personal death inconceivable to him.

In conclusion I will simply commend him to all good readers, and especially young readers, whose intelligence and character are still plastic to influences from without and effluences from within, as one of the most powerful and cordial and wholesome writers they can become acquainted with ; as a modern of the moderns, to counterpoise yet harmonise with the august ancients ; and (if we consider Emerson as in large measure the result of old-world culture) as indisputably the greatest native voice yet heard from America. Emphatically great, magnanimous, I always find

him; in his faults as in his merits there is never any littleness of heart or mind. And even the great faults of the great-hearted are more sanative than the petty virtues of the mean.

P.S.—Since writing the above I have been favoured by Mr. J. Dixon, of Sunderland, with a copy of the *New Republic* of Camden, New Jersey, for June 20th, 1874. This paper publishes a short piece by Whitman, which was recited as Commencement Poem at Tuft's College, Mass., three days before, and is entitled "Song of the Universal." It also contains an article on the poet, from which we learn that he was then residing in Camden with his brother Colonel Whitman; that he was still an invalid, "pretty thoroughly lamed," and suffering from tedious cerebral disease, from which, however, himself and his physicians firmly believed that he would recover. The paralysis which suddenly attacked his left side in February of last year is traced back to the enormous stress and strain of his heroic life during and after the war. He was frequently remonstrated with during those years for over-taxing and over-exposing himself, but would banteringly reply that "nothing could ever affect him," or that "he was just the man to go among the sick, he was so ridiculously well," or that "he really felt ashamed to be so fat and healthy, while so many better men than himself lay low from wounds and sickness." The paralytic attack of last year was not of extreme severity, and he was recovering from it rapidly (as stated at the end of Section IV of

my article), and had even resumed his official work, when some very heavy family bereavements plunged him back into a worse state than before, and his recovery since has been slow. The physicians have decided that his malady is *anæmia* (deficiency of blood) of the brain. "Sleep, appetite, flesh, and even colour are not lost. He goes out a little nearly every day, and writes sometimes, when he feels like it." The doctors have been much puzzled by his case: his experienced physician at Washington, Dr. W. B. Drinkard, after attending him for months, says, "Mr. Whitman's physical mould, his habits of life, tastes, and mental constitution, are, I think, the most *natural* I have encountered."

It seems that last Winter and Spring he contributed to the *New York Weekly Graphic* a series of war reminiscences entitled "'Tis Ten Years Since." His "Song of the Redwood Tree" and "Prayer of Columbus" appeared in recent numbers of *Harper's Monthly*. Another little poem of his, "Kiss to the Bride," appeared in various American journals not long since. I have not seen any of these compositions.

## WALT WHITMAN

(Reprinted from "*Cope's Tobacco Plant.*")

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### I

UPWARDS of four years ago (see the *Tobacco Plant*, December, 1875) the eccentric "Poet of the Sierras," Joaquin Miller, lecturing at Washington, told his countrymen: "Here in America, here in this high capital, there was once a colossal mind; an old and honourable man, with a soul as grand as Homer's—the Milton of America. He walked these streets for years, a plain brave old man, who was kind even to your dogs. He had done great service, in a humble way, in the army; he had written great books, which had been translated in all tongues and read in all lands save our own. In consideration thereof he was given a little place under the Government, where he could barely earn bread enough for himself and his old mother. . . . At last, stricken with palsy, he left the place, leaning upon his staff, to go away and die. I saw him but the other day, dying destitute. Grand old WALT WHITMAN! Even now he looks like a Titan god!" These statements caused a considerable stir, and called forth others with very various comments, both in America and England, of which I shall have to

say something in the sequel. But first, merely premising that by the latest reports Whitman is not yet dead, it will be well to give some account of him in his previous life, including his "great service, in a humble way, in the army." Some consideration of the "great books" he has written will fitly close this slight essay.

For biographical facts I am mainly indebted to the little book by Dr. John Burroughs, "Notes on Walt Whitman, as Poet and Person" (2nd edition, New York, 1871), often using its very words without marks of quotation. Whitman was born in the farm village of West Hills, on Long Island, New York, about thirty miles from New York City, on May 31, 1819; and is thus not so old in years as Joaquin Miller's words suggest, though indeed prematurely aged by enormous expenditure of vitality and continual self-exposure to hospital malaria in his prime. The father, of good English stock, an excellent citizen, parent, and neighbour, was first a farmer on his own land, with a dozen or fifteen slaves, then a house-builder and carpenter. The mother, a Van Velsor, of good old Dutch and seafaring English stock, was a healthy, cheerful, sagacious, and generous woman, the fit rearer of a large family of sons and daughters. "I have more than once heard Walt Whitman say that his views of humanity, and of the female sex, could never have been what they are if he had not had the practical proof of his mother and other noble women always before him." She lived with Walt when he was grown up. In the final Author's Edition of his works in two volumes (Camden, New Jersey,

1876), in the Preface to the second volume, which serves for both, he interjects in a Note, p. 7:—

“[As I write these lines, May 31, 1875, it is again early summer—again my birthday—now my fifty-sixth. Amid the outside beauty and freshness, the sunlight and verdure of the delightful season, O how different the moral atmosphere amid which I now revise this volume, from the jocund influences surrounding the growth and advent of *LEAVES OF GRASS* [his main literary work]. I occupy myself arranging these pages for publication, still enveloped in thoughts of the death two years since of my dear mother, the most perfect and magnetic character, the rarest combination of practical, moral, and spiritual, and the least selfish of all and any I have ever known—and by me O so much the most deeply loved . . . and also under the physical affliction of a tedious attack of paralysis, obstinately lingering and keeping its hold upon me, and quite suspending all bodily activity and comfort. . . . I see now, much clearer than ever—perhaps these experiences were needed to show—how much my former poems, the bulk of them, are indeed the expression of health and strength, and sanest, joyfulest life.]”

I have thought it better to complete the parenthesis, though cited principally for his words about his mother. In his early childhood the family moved to Brooklyn, then a charming rural town, now related to New York much as the London of Surrey to the London of Middlesex, or as Birkenhead to Liverpool. Here he attended a national school for some years. In 1825, Lafayette—hero of the American and French Revolutions, and yet to figure in the Three Days of July—during his visit to the country where he won his earliest fame, rode

through Brooklyn in state, and consented to lay the corner-stone of a free public library. The schools were out to greet him, and gentlemen helped up the smaller children to good places for witnessing the ceremony. Among the rest Lafayette, also helping the little ones, took up Walt, and pressing the child a moment to his breast and giving him a kiss, set him on a favourable spot. This was an early chivalrous consecration of the poet whose love is almost filial for France.

When thirteen he went into a printing office and learned to set type. When about sixteen and seventeen he spent his summers in the country and along the seaside of the island, teaching and "boarding round" among the families of his pupils; a good simple arrangement common to sparsely-settled civilized regions. A short sketch or story sent by him to the *Democratic Review*, then the leading literary periodical of New York, having made "a hit," he followed it with others, and soon followed it himself, becoming a Bohemian of the press in the Empire City. He was then a Democrat (say, Old Whig or Tory); the Fugitive Slave Law afterwards made him a Republican (Liberal or Radical). Dr. Burroughs, a most enthusiastic and very intelligent disciple, says: "Once in a while he appears at the political mass meetings as a speaker. He is on the Democratic side, at the time going for Van Buren for President, and, in due course, for Polk. He speaks in New York, and down on Long Island, where he is made much of." And then, with a very broad suggestiveness, perhaps too broad: "Through this period—from 1837

to 1848—without entering into particulars, it is enough to say that he sounded all experiences of life, with all their passions, pleasures, and abandonments. He was young, in perfect bodily condition, and had the city of New York and its ample opportunities around him. I trace this period in some of the poems in the ‘Children of Adam,’ and occasionally in other parts of his book, including ‘Calamus.’ Those who have met the poet of late years, and think of him only as the composed and grey-bearded man of the present, must not forget in reading the ‘Leaves’ those previous and more ardent stages of his career—though of Walt Whitman it may be said that he is always young.” A writer, very bitterly contemptuous and unconsciously comical, to whose article I shall have to recur, states, in the highly respectable *Appleton’s Journal*, of New York:—

“When the celebrated hard-cider and coon-skin political campaign [*Alas for its celebrity! What were the momentous issues at stake?*] stirred up the community in 1848, Whitman was drawn into it, and spouted Democracy from the stump, as it is very common for young men to do in the country. Waxing ambitious, and wishing to escape the Democratic labour in the country, he came to New York to get a living by his wits. [But this was long before 1848; as appears not only from Dr. Burroughs’s narrative, but from this article itself farther on.] Well introduced by political acquaintance, he took to the business of writing for newspapers and magazines. He wrote stories, essays, articles of all sorts that he could sell. . . . His contributions to the *Democratic Review* from 1840 to 1850, signed Walter Whitman, appeared among those of Whittier, Poe, Brownson, Hawthorne,

Tuckerman, Curtis, Godwin, and Taylor. They are decorous, jejune, and commonplace, contrasting strongly with the general quality of the magazine, and deserving no attention, they attracted none. . . . He was, moreover, a pleasant gentleman, of agreeable address, and went into society as well attired as his precarious resources would allow. In short, he was an entirely respectable person, with nothing marked about him, and meeting with a dubious success due to moderate ability, qualified by excessive indolence. Such was Whitman's 'foreground.' He had a dozen or fifteen years' experience of practical literature and miscellaneous journalism in the metropolis, with every opportunity to win a position and make himself known if he had been capable of it. But Whitman had an ambition, born of egregious vanity, and he was not content with the obscurity from which he had been unable to escape in the open competitions of literature. . . . If he could not win fame, he would have notoriety ; if the critics would not recognise him, he must find people that would. . . . Donning a tarpaulin, blouse, and red flannel shirt, conspicuously open, he snubbed conventionalities, clambered on the outside of the omnibus, cultivated the driver, and soon became a hero among the roughs. Sauntering leisurely along the thoroughfares, and lingering at show windows in his jaunty uncouth costume, with a quiet air of defying the world, he soon attracted attention, and began to be talked of and inquired about. He thus got recognition as 'Walt Whitman,' patron and pride of the ruder elements of society."

We note, in passing, that this anonymous writer does not conceive it possible that Whitman could have any natural affinity for "the ruder elements of society ;" any natural weariness, growing to distaste or even disgust, of "entirely respectable persons :" no, he revolted from these and consorted

with those because, as the critic clearly discerns with infallible insight, he "had an ambition, born of egregious vanity," and "if he could not win fame, he would have notoriety." In brief, he is another illustration of the old story, so happily expounded by our subtle Dr. Goldsmith,

"The dog to serve his private ends  
Went mad, and bit the man :"

in his case, of course, peculiarly the respectable man. Yet a poet of some culture, not generally ranked with the rowdies (though perhaps for what follows and much else he ought to be), one Goethe, in the prime of life, wrote No. 76 of the Epigrams, dated Venice, 1790:—

"Hast du nicht gute Gesellschaft gesehn? Es zeigt uns dein  
Büchlein  
Fast nur Gaukler und Volk, ja was noch neidriger ist.  
Gute Gesellschaft hab' ich gesehn, man nennt sie die gute,  
Wenn sie zum kleinsten Gedicht keine Gelegenheit giebt."

"Have you not seen good society, then? Your booklet scarce  
shows us  
Aught but mob and buffoon, and what is even more base.  
Good society, yes, I have seen, as good it is noted,  
When to the smallest of poems never occasion it gives."

And how his most notorious pupil, whom many yet revere as a lofty poet and sage, the *sans-culotte* Carlyle, revels in mordant mockery of respectability that keep its gig, is only too well known by our shuddering respectable world.

Dr. Burroughs, lacking the victorious insight of Mr. Anon., writes very simply:—

"At all times he has liked well the society of the class  
called 'common people.' He has gone much with such

persons, for instance, as the New York bay pilots, the fishermen down Long Island, certain country farmers and city mechanics, and especially the Broadway stage-drivers. The latter class for years have adopted him as a special favourite and chum. He has ridden on top of the stages with them, gone of an afternoon along Broadway, or from Fulton Ferry, or Bowling Green up to Twenty-third-street; so noting and absorbing the life and objects of his endeared 'Mannahatta.' He has often and often visited in and around the island all such places as the shipyards, the foundries, &c.; is fond of the public shows, and delights in those extra gala days or distinguished receptions when 'million-footed Manhattan descends to her pavements.'"

From both accounts alike it seems clear that he has persistently cultivated a low taste (natural or acquired) for low life and company; to what deplorable and shameful results we shall see farther on. There would be equal folly in trying to defend him for this very vulgar behaviour, or in pretending to pity him for its very frightful consequences. A man is known by the company he keeps: if with the sick, he is sick—unless, indeed, a physician; if with the poor, he is poor—unless, indeed, a philanthropist; if with the ignorant, he is ignorant—unless, indeed, a teacher; if with the great, he is great—unless, indeed, a lackey. We all know the righteous judgment passed by those eminently respectable persons the Pharisees on a poor man who was the friend of publicans and sinners, that he was gluttonous and a winebibber; and when he cast out devils, it was naturally through the prince of devils. So wisdom is justified of her children.

Dr. Burroughs gives one little set-off against the general vulgarity :

"The artistic pleasure he has always most cared for is the Italian opera, or some good band or concert. Many passages of his poetry were composed in the gallery [vulgarity or poverty even here!] of the New York Academy during the opera performances." Then, resuming the narrative : "In 1849 he began travelling. Passing down through Pennsylvania and Maryland, he crossed the Alleghanies, went aboard a small trading steamer at Wheeling, and by slow stages, and with many and long stoppages and detours, journeyed along and down the Ohio river. In the same manner, well pleased with Western steamboat life and its scenes, he descended by degrees the Mississippi. In New Orleans he edited a newspaper, and lived there a year, when he again ascended the Mississippi to St. Louis ; moved through that region, explored the Illinois river, and the towns along its bank, and lingered some while in Wisconsin, and among the great lakes ; stopt north of the straits of Mackinaw, also at Niagara and in Canada. He saw western and north-western nature and character in all their phases, and probably took there and then the decided inspiration of his future poetry. After some two years, returning to Brooklyn, I trace him again trying his hand at a printer's occupation. He started a newspaper, first as weekly and then as daily. He sold out and went into business as carpenter and builder (his father's trade), worked with his own hands at the rougher work, and built and sold moderate-priced houses.

"It is at this period (1853 and the seasons immediately following) that I come on the first inkling of 'Leaves of Grass.' Walt Whitman is now thirty-four years old, and in the full fruition of health and physique. There is a lull or interval in his house-building business, so that he has no cares from that

quarter. In 1855, then, after many manuscript doings and undoings, and much matter destroyed, and two or three complete re-writings, the essential foundation of 'Leaves of Grass' was laid, and the superstructure raised, in the piece called 'Walt Whitman,' and some nine or ten smaller pieces, forming the thin quarto or first edition."

It was poorly printed, set up by Whitman himself, with no author's name; but with a portrait for frontispiece, reproduced in Mr. W. M. Rossetti's Selection of the Poems (London, 1868), containing nearly half of what was then published, each selected piece entire; in which is also included the very valuable prose Preface to that first edition, omitted from subsequent ones, much of it being worked up in the body of the Poems, but decidedly worthy of perpetuation in its first integrity. The book had no publisher; some three-score copies were put for sale in a book store in Brooklyn, and as many in another store in New York. Weeks elapsed, and not a copy was sold. Although Whitman at that time "had never read the Essays or Poems of Mr. Emerson at all," a copy of the "Leaves" was naturally sent to the Sage of Concord; for, as Hawthorne had noted several years earlier: "People that had lighted on a new thought, or a thought they fancied new, came to Emerson, as the finder of a glittering gem hastens to a lapidary, to ascertain its quality and value." The book elicited the following acknowledgment:—

"Concord, Mass., July 21, 1855.

"DEAR SIR,—I am not blind to the worth of the wonderful gift of 'LEAVES OF GRASS.' I find it the

most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed. I am very happy in reading it, as great power makes us happy. It meets the demand I am always making of what seemed the sterile and stingy Nature, as if too much handiwork, or too much lymph in the temperament, were making our Western wits fat and mean.

“I give you joy of your free and brave thought. I have great joy in it. I find incomparable things said incomparably well, as they must be. I find the courage of treatment which so delights us, and which large perception only can inspire.

“I greet you at the beginning of a great career, which yet must have had a long foreground somewhere, for such a start. I rubbed my eyes a little to see if this sunbeam were no illusion ; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. It has the best merits ; namely, of fortifying and encouraging.

“I did not know, until I last night saw the book advertised in a newspaper, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post-office. I wish to see my benefactor, and have felt much like striking my tasks and visiting New York to pay you my respects.

“Walt Whitman.

R. W. EMERSON.”

It must be borne in mind that when Emerson wrote thus he was not a raw youth easily swept off his feet by a sudden surge of enthusiasm : he was fifty-two years of age, had long been generally acknowledged the foremost living thinker of America, and so long ago as 1841 had been introduced to the British public by Carlyle, with praise as cordial and generous as this with which he now welcomed the work of his unknown countryman.

Let us now see how our “anonymuncle” of *Appleton's Journal*, with his irresistible insight,

goes on to relate and expound this matter in his astonishing article "The Genesis of Walt Whitman":—

"Coincident with this external transformation there was an internal change equally marked. He made a strike in literature from his new standpoint. He had been scribbling away for years to no purpose [*save, perhaps, of earning a sort of livelihood?*], and at last he charged his old carbine with smut to the very muzzle, let drive, and [*burst it? no*] brought down the first of American thinkers at the first shot [*with a ten or twenty-fold charge of smut!?*]. More literally, he issued a 'pome,' so-called in his new vernacular [*the refined critic is apparently sarcastic, and means the vernacular of the roughs with whom W. consorted; for W. writes 'poem' like any ordinary man*], entitled 'Leaves of Grass.' Mr. Whitman had never been celebrated; he had found no one to celebrate him, and so the first words of his new book were, 'I celebrate myself.' It was a performance of unparalleled audacity. In total contrast with all he had ever done before, it was an outrage upon decency, and not fit to be seen in any respectable house. Impudent and ridiculous as the book was, it would not have been easy to get it before the public, but accident and the author's cunning favoured him. He sent a copy to Mr. Emerson, who returned a very flattering, but probably hasty, private note, not dreaming that any public use would be made of it. Walt printed it at once, and the weight of Emerson's name sent the book straightway into circulation. Then people made pilgrimages to see the extraordinary man with the curious aspect that had made such an astonishing book [*the aspect had?*], and of whom nobody had ever heard before; and the notion was spread that he was the original genius of Nature itself, unwarped by culture,

unspoiled by society, careless of conventions, because dwelling far above them in the realm of his own sublime individuality. The external evidence coincides with Mr. Bayne's analysis of Whitman's writings [of which, perchance, more anon: it appeared in the *Contemporary* of Dec., 1875], in showing that they are but an affectation and a pretence. Those may believe who will that when he entered upon the *role* [sic], dressed up accordingly, vulgarised his name, and wrote a book filled with drivel and indecency, Mr. Whitman suddenly became the inspired poet of democracy, and, as Swinburne says, 'the greatest of American voices,' but against such a view common sense protests."

I quote this at length, and am about to make some remarks on it in addition to the irrepressible interjaculations while transcribing, not assuredly for its intrinsic worth, which is very much worse than merely worthless, but because it is an exquisitely typical example of the style in which the anonymuncles of "respectable" journalism are wont to write of any original, powerful, sincere, daring genius or character for a full generation or two (sometimes even for centuries instead of generations) after its bewildering advent. For any approach to instant and instinctive recognition of such a prodigy, look a thousand times rather to the robust native sense of the most illiterate toiling men and women than to the pert, dapper, conceited "cleveralities" of the press, or the smug, self-satisfied, "educated" dunces of "good society;" the mountebanks of fine phrases and jugglers of catchwords with their coats of many colours, or the prigs of prim decorums and approved chevaliers of polite poltrooneries. John Wesley found that he

could preach deep to the nether million of rude rustics and artizans, but only shallow to the upper ten thousand of fine ladies and gentlemen; and that other "Knight of the Holy Ghost," Heinrich Heine, carols with ringing laughter,

"Doch die Castraten klagten  
    Als ich meine Stimm' erhob;  
Sie klagten, und sie sagten:  
    Ich sänge viel zu grob."

"Ever the eunuchs whimpered  
    When I sang out with force;  
They whimpered, and they simpered:  
    My singing was much too coarse."

(1) Mark how the criticaster, in his anxiety to abase Whitman, abases "the first of American thinkers," and, therefore, yet more all other American thinkers very far below him; the first of American thinkers, their lofty and pure Transcendentalist, is brought down by the first shot from an old carbine charged with smut to the very muzzle! finds a book filled with drivel and indecency, "the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom that America has yet contributed"! (2) It is well known that writers or speakers assuming the championship of religion, or morality, or decency, are perfectly free to violate them all in denunciation of their assumed violators; and the criticaster avails himself to the utmost of this evil privilege in the gross calumny or wholesale reckless and malignant falsehood of his "charged with smut to the very muzzle," "an outrage upon decency, and not fit to be seen in any respectable house," "a book filled with drivel and indecency." The book is *not* charged with

smut, unless Biblical plainness and freedom and sincerity of language be smut; is *not* filled with indecency (let us leave the "drivel" at present to the drivelling anonymuncule), unless rejoicing glorification of the strength and beauty, the faculties and functions of the body, in harmony with those of the soul, be indecency. The author of the First Epistle to the Corinthians writes (vi., 19-20): "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." Theology apart, as not concerning us in this place, is this indecency? An ascetic of the thirteenth century writes (Early English Text Society, "Mirror of St. Edmund," quoted in a good article on Whitman, *Westminster Review*, July, 1871):—"As to thy body, thou art muck. Thou wast gotten of so vile matter, of so great filth, that it is shame for to speak and abomination for to think. Thou shalt be delivered to toads and adders to eat." Theology still apart, is this decency? In the words of the *Westminster* reviewer "Whitman's most naked physical descriptions and enumerations are those of a robust, vigorous, clean man, enamoured of living, unashamed of body as he is unashamed of soul, absolutely free from prurienty of imagination, absolutely inexperienced in the artificial excitements and enhancements of jaded lusts." (3) The first words of his new book, the poem entitled "Walt Whitman," *were*, "I celebrate myself"; but they are not the full sentence, there

was only a comma, and now is only a semi-colon, not a full stop, after them; and these clauses complete the period.

“And what I assume you shall assume;  
For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to you.”

So the criticaster, by a dodge common to his kind, scores a very small point by a very large suppression of truth; falsifying the great celebration of the poet as a type of all mankind into the narrow celebration of his vain sole self. (4) Where was “the author’s cunning” in sending a copy to Emerson? where the “accident” in Emerson answering as he did? Are we to understand that, a new book being sent to this “first of American thinkers,” it is a mere toss-up whether he shall write back that it is one of the best and greatest or one of the worst and meanest he has ever read? (5) By what does the criticaster judge that Emerson’s note was “probably hasty”? how does he know that it was “private,” and that Emerson did not dream “that any public use would be made of it”? I ask every reader of sense whether it bears throughout the impress of haste or of deliberation; whether such words as these are not conspicuously opposed to the theory of haste: “I *am* very happy in reading it. . . . I *have* great joy in it. . . . I rubbed my eyes a little, etc.; but the solid sense of the book is a sober certainty. . . . I did not know, until I last night saw the book advertised, that I could trust the name as real and available for a post office.” I appeal to every honourable man and woman whether such a letter from Emerson to an unknown writer could

be considered private, and not the public manifesto or award of the acknowledged literary arbiter of his country; and whether it is not an insulting impeachment of Emerson's sense and sincerity (instead of a compliment to Whitman's cunning) to assume that he did not dream of any public use being made of it, that he spontaneously delivered such a judgment in private as he was surprised and ashamed to see published. (6) Consider the infinite absurdity, the truly Bedlamite unreason, of the self-complacent criticaster's theory of "The Genesis of Walt Whitman." An entirely respectable man, of moderate ability but immoderate vanity, after a dozen or fifteen years' experience in journalism, suddenly throws off respectability, consorts with loafers, becomes a hero among the roughs, writes in pure affectation and pretence a book or "pome" filled with drivel and indecency, which is hailed by the first of his country's thinkers as the most extraordinary piece of wit and wisdom America has yet produced, and is acclaimed with equal, or almost equal, enthusiasm by some of the best poets and most accomplished critics in England! Here is a short and easy cut to fame for the many hundreds of obscure journalists of moderate ability, immoderate vanity, and no definable scrupulosity beyond what may be implied in *That won't pay!* Why have none of them, not even our smug criticaster, essayed it? So much for the purely literary aspect of the theory: when we come to apply it to the general life of Whitman we shall find it yet more ludicrously and lunatically amazing. In the meantime think how admirably it

will fit and explain the career of any one in history who has abandoned the common pathways of life, in obedience to a "call," or in consequence of a "new birth" of whatever kind. George Fox was an entirely respectable shoemaker's apprentice, till in mere affectation and pretence he clothed himself in leather, withdrew from respectable society, and founded the sect of the Quakers. John Bunyan was a very decent tinker, till in mere affectation and pretence he set up as a Baptist preacher, got shut up in jail for a dozen years, and wrote such "pomes" as the "Holy War" and the "Pilgrim's Progress." Oliver Cromwell was an eminently respectable farmer and grazier, till in mere affectation and pretence he took to Puritanism, organised the Ironsides, fought Marston Moor and Dunbar and Worcester, beheaded Charles Stuart, and made himself Lord Protector. *Eureka!* we have found the master-key to unlock the inmost secret of every exceptional or extraordinary career! And how happy are we who have hundreds or thousands of adroit anonymuncles ready and anxious to apply it in scores or hundreds of "respectable" periodicals to all who have any pretensions to powerful originality; thus saving us from an immense waste of admiration and even reverence! Yet poor Dr. Burroughs takes this lesson rather bitterly, actually quoting from Carlyle's "Frederick," Book xiv., concerning "that Anarchic Republic called of Letters," the acrid sentence: "When your lowest blockhead and scoundrel (usually one entity) shall have perfect freedom to spit in the face of your highest sage and hero, what a remarkably free world we shall be!" *We are!*

## II

Emerson's letter, published in the newspapers, soon sold off the first edition, about a thousand, of "Leaves of Grass." In 1856, or early in 1857, a second edition came out (Emerson's letter and a long reply from Whitman, not in after editions, appended), with some new pieces, notably "A Woman Waits for Me" in the "Children of Adam" Series. "A storm had been muttering before, but at the publication of this piece it burst forth in fullest fury. . . . The publishers were frightened. They had stereotyped the work, and printed and bound a thousand copies. These they soon sold, remunerating expenses, and then quietly asked to be excused from continuing the book any further."

About this time Mr. Moncure D. Conway paid him a visit, recorded in the *Fortnightly Review*, October, 1866, from which I select and condense. Whitman, then about thirty-seven, was living with his mother, a fine old lady, in a two-storey wooden building, the last house from town (New York). Mr. Conway found him on the central hillock, without tree or shelter, of an open common, lying on his back and gazing at the blazing midsummer mid-day sun, which was not at all too fierce for him; though the thermometer stood at nearly 100 degrees (presumably in the shade). He lay thus supine, not very distinguishable from the soil, in grey clothing, blue-grey shirt, with iron-grey hair, swart sunburnt face and bare throat, on the brown

and white grass. His school education was of the common English sort ; the books he chiefly read were the Bible, Homer, and Shakespeare ; and these he probably had in his pockets. His favourite reading-places [or studying places?] were the top of a 'bus and Coney Island, a small sand-heap, then quite uninhabited ; his favourite place for meditation and composition was the bare hillock on the lonely common. Though so free as to himself in writing, he was inclined to be taciturn on the subject in talk. He said that he had learned all he knew from stage-drivers, pilots of ferry-boats, fishermen, boatmen, men and women of the markets and wharves. He told how he had spoken with Henry Ward Beecher, whom he liked ; but Beecher having acknowledged, when questioned, that he was shocked by the oaths of the streets, Walt concluded that he would stick to his rough swearing friends, who had no Shibboleths of respectability. In his youth he had listened to the great Quaker iconoclast, Elias Hicks ; his maternal grandmother was a Quakeress ; and the impress of the Friends is here and there traceable in his writings. He spoke of his farm work, how he had taught school, been a carpenter, a builder of frame-houses, a printer, having himself set up his first book. He confessed that he had no talent for industry, that his forte lay in loafing and writing poems. He was very poor, but had discovered that he could, on the whole, live magnificently on bread and water. They spent the rest of the day in loafing on Staten Island, where they had shade, and many miles of a beautiful beach. "While he bathed I was impressed by a

certain grandeur about the man, and remembered the picture of Bacchus on the wall of his room. I then perceived that the sun had put a red mask on his face and neck, and that his body was a ruddy blonde, pure and noble, his form being at the same time remarkable for fine curves and for that grace of movement which is the flower of shapely and well-knit bones. His head was oviform in every way; his hair, which was strongly mixed with grey, was cut close to his head, and, with his beard, was a strange contrast to the almost infantine fulness and serenity of his face. This serenity, however, came from the quiet light blue eyes [others, including himself, term them grey; "Behold this swarthy face—these grey eyes"; "Calamus," p. 135], and above these there were three or four deep horizontal furrows, which life had ploughed. The first glow of any kind that I saw about him was when he entered the water, which he fairly hugged with a lover's enthusiasm. But when he was talking about that which deeply interested him, his voice, always gentle and clear, became slow, and his eyelids had a tendency to decline over his eyes. It was impossible not to feel at every moment the reality [*evident "affectation and pretence"!*] of every word and movement of the man, and also the surprising delicacy [*obvious "indecency" and "smut"!*] of one who was even freer with his pen than honest Montaigne." Strolling in New York, he was continually met by lower-class acquaintances, who grasped his hands with enthusiasm, and laughed and chatted. He laughed not, nor even smiled. A workman in corduroys, privately interrogated,

said, Nobody knows Walt but likes him ; nearly everybody knows him, and—loves him. None of these people knew anything about his authorship ; it was simply the man himself they idolised. Visiting the Tombs prison, the prisoners ran to tell him their grievances. Concerning one case he confronted the Governor, and said with deliberate emphasis, In my opinion it is a damned shame ; and, after a duel of eye-shots, the official quailed. Mr. Conway deems that emphatic oath one of the most pious utterances he has ever heard. Whitman's room was almost bare, with one window, which overlooked the barren solitudes of the island ; there were two prints, a Bacchus and a Silenus, but no books. As soon as he had attained clear conception of his mission, to be the poet of modern democracy, the first truly national singer of America, "the teeming nation of nations," he wrote on a piece of paper in large letters, "MAKE THE WORK," and fixed it above his table where he could always see it when writing. Mr. Conway bears witness in his own case to a supreme characteristic of Whitman, to which we have elsewhere abundance of testimony ; his marvellous personal influence, his intense and enormous magnetism : "He had so magnetised me, so charged me with something indefinable, that for the time the only wise course of life seemed to be to put on blue shirt and blouse, and loaf about Manahatta and Paumonak [New York and Long Island]."

In 1856 Whitman was visited by that remarkable original, the poetic naturalist (in a very intimate sense), and Orientalist, Henry Thoreau, a man of

real genius but very little marketable talent; whom Emerson celebrated in the first part of his "Wood Notes" and elsewhere, Hawthorne in the Introduction to "Mosses from an Old Manse," and who in his life and writings has been recently introduced to the British public by a little book, whose author, Mr. A. H. Japp, adopts the pseudonym H. A. Page. Thoreau writes: "That Walt Whitman is the most interesting fact to me at present. Wonderfully like the Orientals, too. He is apparently the greatest Democrat the world has seen." And again, "He is Democracy." And yet again, "After all he suggests something a little more than human."

In the spring and early summer of 1860 Whitman was at Boston reading the proofs for a third and handsome edition of his poems, with many additional pieces; an edition of which some four to five thousand copies were eventually sold. Dr. Burroughs has heard Whitman speak of this sojourn as one of the pleasantest reminiscences of his life. But he is of New York, not Boston; having altogether too much rude human nature to be at one with the elect of the hub of the universe. I think it is Dr. O. W. Holmes, one of the cleverest, and far from the least modest, of the Bostonians (whose children, it is averred, are weaned on fish, and light themselves up to bed with their own aureoles of brain-phosphorescence), who defines Whitman as half Bowery boy (say, Whitechapel rough) and half Emersonian Greek. Whitman, in the General Notes to his "Democratic Vistas," 1870, writes deliberately, p. 79:—

"I have myself little or no hope from what is

technically called 'Society' in our American cities. New York, of which place I have spoken so sharply [pp. 13-14], still promises something, in time, out of its tremendous and varied materials, with a certain superiority of intuitions, and the advantage of constant agitation, and ever new and rapid dealings of the cards. Of Boston with its circles of social mummies, swathed in ceremonials harder than brass—its bloodless religion (Unitarianism), its complacent vanity of scientism and literature, lots of grammatical correctness, mere knowledge (always wearisome, in itself)—its zealous abstractions, ghosts of reforms—I should say (ever admitting its business powers, its sharp, almost demoniac intellect, and no lack, in its own way, of courage and generosity)—there is, at present, little of cheering, satisfying sign. In the West, California, &c., 'society' is yet unformed, puerile, seemingly unconscious of anything above a driving business, or to liberally spend the money made by it in the usual rounds and shows."

So that Boston and New York are to Whitman much as *Blackwood* and *Fraser* were to Carlyle in 1833, as reported by Emerson in the "English traits": the former, as hopelessly sterile, the sand magazine; the latter, as suggesting some possibilities of life, the mud magazine: if New York "society" is mud, Boston is arid sand.

And now came the supreme test of Whitman, as of so many millions of other Americans, North, South, and West; the Great Civil War. We are not here concerned with political issues, but with personal character in its essential self-consistency. We know how the New England Abolitionists, who had often threatened secession from slavery, denounced as fraticide and matricide, sacrilege and

horrible high treason, the secession of the Slave States from them. We know how the humanitarian Lowell before the Civil War wrote, "Ef fer war, I call it murder," "Ef you take a sword an' dror it"; and, of North and South,

"Ef I'd my way I had ruther  
 We should go to work an' part—  
 They take one way, we take t'other,—  
 Guess it wouldn't break my heart.  
 Men hed oug' to put assunder  
 Them that God has noways jined ;  
 An' I shouldn't gretly wonder  
 Ef there's thousands o' my mind."

But during the war he wrote, with much else in the same strain :—

"There's critters yit that talk an' act  
 Fer wut they call Conciliation ;  
 They'd hand a buff'lo-drove a tract  
 When they wuz madder than all Bashan.

"Old Hick'ry wouldn't ha' stood see-saw  
 'Bout doin' things till they wuz done with,—  
 He'd smashed the tables o' the Law  
 In time o' need to load his gun with :

"He couldn't see but jest one side,—  
 Ef his, 't wuz God's and that wuz plenty ;  
 An' so his '*Forrards!*' multiplied  
 An army's fightin' weight by twenty."

We know how the severe Transcendentalist Emerson, in 1848, as recorded by himself in the "Traits," when asked by Carlyle and another whether there was any American idea or theory of the right future of that country, bethought himself neither of caucuses nor congress, but only of the simplest and

purest minds, and answered "Certainly yes . . . the only true. . . . So I opened the dogma of no-government and non-resistance. . . I can easily see the bankruptcy of the vulgar musket-worship,—though great men be musket-worshippers; and 'tis certain, as God liveth, the gun that does not need another gun, the law of love and justice alone, can effect a clean revolution." So saintly was he that "C. refused to go out before me,—'he was altogether too wicked.'" But on the murder of Lincoln, Mr. Emerson, addressing a public meeting, as reported in the journals of the time, pointed out a certain providential compensation for his loss: with the gentle Lincoln alive, there would have been danger of the vanquished South being let off too cheaply; but now the exasperated North would inflict condign punishment on the "Rebels." (I have not preserved the exact words, but I remember well their main purport: the real character and principles of "Andy Johnson" were as yet thoroughly misunderstood.) That is how these very superior gentlemen emerged from the great ordeal; turned inside out and upside down, their Quaker drab Red Indian war-paint, for universal peace and love breathing fire and slaughter and revenge, all their superfine philosophy of the study shrivelled up and consumed away in the flames of the vulgarest brutal savagery. I, for one, had had enough of your Boston Transcendentalists after such sorry exhibitions: the Ideal had foundered too ignominiously in the stormy Real; Concord was all discord. Let us now see how our hero of the roughs, the uncultivated half Bowery boy, all

affectation and pretence, drivel and indecency, stood the same searching trial. To him the Union was much more "fetish" than to the fanatical Abolitionists (though he was no less decidedly against slavery); but precisely because it was so, because he could not conceive the possibility of its disruption, and because his heart was too large to be filled with a fanatacism, he continued to regard the Southerners no less than the Northerners as his fellow-countrymen and brothers through all the sad and fatal strife. He also wrote poems on the war, many poems, immeasurably greater and deeper and nobler than anything I have seen by Lowell or Emerson, or any other American, on the same subject. But scarcely ever does a word of bitterness escape him save on Lincoln's death, and then it is not Emerson's bitterness gloating on the prostrate foe; and the main spirit of his "Drum-Taps" swells to its full height at the close in the solemn and tender and magnanimous "Reconciliation":—

"Word over all, beautiful as the sky!  
Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in  
time be utterly lost;  
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly  
softly wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:  
. . . For my enemy is dead—a man divine as myself is  
dead;  
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—I  
draw near;  
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face  
in the coffin."

And in his Notes (written 1875) to the "Memoranda during the War," pp. 63-8, he stoutly

maintains the following among other important positions (I condense as well as select):—

“The Northern States were really just as responsible for that War (in its precedents, foundations, instigations) as the South. For twenty-five years previous to the outbreak, the controlling ‘Democratic’ nominating conventions were getting to represent, and to be composed of, more and more putrid and dangerous materials. One of these Conventions exhibited a spectacle such as could never be seen except in our own age and these States. The members who composed it were, seven-eighths of them, office-holders, office-seekers, pimps, malignants, conspirators, murderer, fancy-men, custom-house clerks, contractors, kept-editors, spaniels well-trained to carry and fetch, jobbers, infidels, disunionists, terrorists, mail-riflers, slave-catchers, pushers of slavery, creatures of the President, creatures of would-be Presidents, spies, blowers, electioneers, bawlers, bribers, compromisers, lobbyists, sponges, ruined sports, expell’d gamblers, policy-backers, monte-dealers, duelists, carriers of conceal’d weapons, deaf men, pimpled men, scarr’d inside with vile disease, gaudy outside with gold chains made from the people’s money and harlots’ money twisted together; crawling, serpentine men, the lousy combings and born freedom-sellers of the earth. And whence came they? From back-yards and bar-rooms; from out of the custom-houses, marshals’ offices, post offices, and gambling-hells; from the President’s house, the jail, the station-house; from unnamed by-places where devilish disunion was hatched at midnight; from political hearses, and from the coffins inside, and from the shrouds inside the coffins; from the tumors and abscesses of the land; from the skeletons and skulls in the vaults of the federal alms-houses; and from the running sores of the great cities. . . . Such, I say, form’d the entire

personnel of our municipal, State, and National Politics ; while the great masses of the people, farmers, mechanics, and traders, were helpless in their gripe. These conditions were mostly prevalent in the North and West, and especially in New York and Philadelphia cities ; and the Southern leaders (bad enough, but of a far higher order) struck hands and affiliated with, and used them. . . .

"I say that the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth terms of the American Presidency have shown that the villainy and shallowness of rulers (back'd by the machinery of great parties) are just as eligible to these States as to any foreign despotism, kingdom, or empire—there is not a bit of difference. . . . (The Slavery contest is settled—and the War is over—yet do not these putrid conditions, too many of them, still exist? still result in diseases, fevers, wounds—not of War and Army Hospitals—but the wounds and diseases of Peace?)

"Out of these generic influences, mainly in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, etc., arose the attempt at disunion. To philosophic examination, the malignant fever of this war shows its embryonic sources, and the original nourishment of its life and growth, in the North. I say Secession, below the surface, originated and was brought to maturity in the Free States. I allude to the score of years preceding 1860. The events of '61 amazed everybody North and South, and burst all prophecies and calculations like bubbles. But even then, and during the whole war, the stern fact remains that *the Secession cause had numerically just as many sympathisers in the Free as in the Rebel States.*

"As to slavery, abstractly and practically, it is too common, I say, to identify it exclusively with the South. In fact, down to the opening of the War, the whole country had about an equal hand in it. The North had at least been just as guilty, if not more guilty ; and the

East and West had. The former Presidents and Congresses had been guilty—the Governors and Legislatures of every Northern State had been guilty, and the mayors of New York and other northern cities had all been guilty—their hands were all stain'd. . . .

“That our National-Democratic experiment, principle, and machinery, could triumphantly sustain such a shock, and that the Constitution could weather it, like a ship in a storm, and come out of it as sound and whole as before, is by far the most signal proof yet of the stability of that experiment, Democracy, and of those principles, and that Constitution. . . . Out of that War not only has the Nationality of The States escaped from being strangled, but more than any of the rest, and, in my opinion, more than the North itself, the vital heart and breath of the South have escaped as from the pressure of a general nightmare, and are now to enter on a life, development, and active freedom, whose realities are certain in the future, notwithstanding all the Southern vexations and humiliations of the hour—a development which could not possibly have been achiev'd on any less terms, or by any other means than that War, or something equivalent to it. And I predict that the South is yet to outstrip the North. . . .

“The present condition of things [1875] in South Carolina, Mississippi, Louisiana, and other parts of the former Slave States—the utter change and overthrow of their whole social, and the greatest coloring feature of their political institutions—a horror and dismay, as of limitless sea of fire, sweeping over them, and substituting the confusion, chaos, and measureless degradation and insult of the present—the black domination, but little above the beasts—viewed as a temporary, deserv'd punishment for their Slavery and Secession sins, may perhaps be admissible; but as a permanency of course it is not to be consider'd for a moment. (Did the vast mass of the blacks, in Slavery in the United States,

present a terrible and deeply complicated problem through the just ending century [of United States independence]? But how if the mass of the blacks in freedom in the United States all through the ensuing century, should present a yet more terrible and yet more deeply complicated problem?) . . .

"Extricating one's-self from the temporary gaucheries of the hour, can there be anything more certain than the rehabilitated prosperity of the Southern States, all and several, if their growing generations, refusing to be dismay'd by present embarrassments and darkness, accept their position in the Union as an immutable fact, and, like the Middle and Western States, 'fly the flag of practical industry and business, and adopting the great ideas of America with faith and courage, developing their resources, providing for education, abandoning old fictions, leave the Secession War and its bygones behind, and resolutely draw a curtain over the past'?

"I want to see the Southern States, in a better sense than ever, and under the new dispensation, again take a leading part in what is emphatically *their* Nationality as much as anybody's. Soon, soon, it will begin to be realized that out of the War, after all, *they* have gained a more substantial victory than anybody."

I have quoted at such length because these judgments of a rude son of the soil appear to me not only more generous but more just, more wise and statesmanlike, more rational, more human, than any that I have met with from the self-complacent high-flyers of the Boston school, with their Puritanic bitterness, their professional pedantries, their thin philosophies, whom we in England are overmuch given to regard as the leaders and representatives of American thought. Their prose

(which includes a large part of their "poetry") may be more compact and scholarly than his; but their sectarian and local narrowness makes a very poor figure in contrast with his continental breadth and freedom. These extracts also prove, what is proved even more forcibly by the "Democratic Vistas," that Whitman, the fervid Abolitionist, Unionist, and Republican, does not blench from seeing and proclaiming with rare insight, veracity, and courage, the immense faults of the triumphant Free States, the enormous corruptions which pervade American Democracy in the present, the enormous difficulties and dangers it has to encounter in the Future. His firm faith, right or wrong, in the ultimate universal triumph of Democracy, is at least faith of that noblest kind which is founded not on the exclusion but on the inclusion of all considerations of doubt and even of despair.

### III

In Section II. I hazarded the statement that Whitman has written poems on the Civil War immeasurably greater and deeper and nobler than anything I have seen by any other American on the same subject. But he did somewhat else than write on the War; somewhat that demanded far more valour and fortitude, as well as that human love which is divine compassion, than merely to fight in it, however bravely; he went to the front to tend and cherish and comfort the multitudinous wounded and sick and dying during the war, and

remained in Washington to carry on the same good work in the immense army hospitals long after the war was over. Mr. W. Douglas O'Connor, in his pamphlet, "The Good Gray Poet; a Vindication" (New York), notes that when the war broke out, and so many were skulking from the call to arms, Whitman was careful to have his name enrolled for service in his turn, although he might easily have evaded, his grey hair making him look much older than he was; but no stress need be laid on such an act in his case. We may be sure that to him it was the most simple and natural act in the world, not costing a moment's thought; he was calmly prepared to do things considerably more difficult than this. Dr. Burroughs says that he first went to the front at the close of '62, to tend his brother, Lieut.-Col. George W. Whitman, 51st New York Veterans, who was hit in the face by a piece of shell at Fredericksburgh; but from the first of Whitman's own "Memoranda During the War" it would appear that he was present at the battle itself. His note on this brother (with whom, I believe, he now lives at Camden, New Jersey), as one of the typical Northern soldiers, is worth citing:—

"—— in '61 a young man working in Brooklyn as a carpenter—was not supposed to have any taste for soldiering—but volunteer'd in the ranks at once on the breaking out of the war—continued in active service all through, four years, re-enlisting twice—was promoted, step by step (several times immediately after battles), Lieutenant, Captain, Major, and Lieut.-Colonel—was in the actions at Roanoke, Newbern, 2d Bull Run, Chantilly, South Mountain, Antietam, Fredericksburgh, Vicks-

burgh, Jackson, the bloody conflicts of the Wilderness, and at Spottsylvania, Cold Harbor, and afterwards around Petersburg. At one of these latter he was taken prisoner, and pass'd four or five months in Secesh military prisons, narrowly escaping with life, from a severe fever, from starvation and half-nakedness in the winter."

Dr. Burroughs tells us that he supported himself during the ensuing two or three years by correspondence with Northern newspapers. Mr. Rossetti, in his Prefatory Notice, writes "he undertook the nursing of the sick and wounded in the field, writing also a correspondence for the *New York Times*: I am informed that it was through Emerson's intervention that he obtained the sanction of President Lincoln for this purpose of charity, with authority to draw the ordinary army rations; Whitman stipulating at the same time that he would not receive any remuneration for his services. . . From the spring of 1863, this nursing, both in the field and more especially in hospital at Washington, became his 'one daily and nightly occupation'; and the strongest testimony is borne to his measureless self-devotion and kindness in the work, and to the unbounded fascination, a kind of magnetic attraction and ascendancy, which he exercised over the patients, often with the happiest sanitary results. Northerner or Southerner, the belligerents received the same tending from him." Returing to Dr. Burroughs, he tells us that Whitman remained in the field during the winter of '62-3, then returned to Washington, where the sick and wounded were mainly concentrated. The capital

city was then one huge hospital. Mr. O'Connor writes in the *Vindication* : "Few know the spectacle presented by those grim wards. It was hideous. I have been there at night, when it seemed that I should die with sympathy if I stayed." He spent the winter of '63-4 with the army at Brandy Station and Culpepper, Virginia, among the brigade and division hospitals. The following summer the "bloody holocaust of the Wilderness, and the fierce promenade down to the James river," gave him plenty to do, and he did it well, until prostrated himself. Burroughs says in a note :—

"In the hot summer of 1864, Whitman, who up to that period [age 45] had been the picture of health, and strong, unsurpassed physique, was taken down with an illness which, although he recovered from it, has left effects upon him to this day. He was nurse at the time to a number of soldiers, badly wounded in the late battles, and whose wounds, from previous enforced neglect and the intense heat of the weather, were mortified, and several corrupted with worms. He remained assiduously day and night with these lamentable cases. The consequence was that his system, doubtless weakened by anxiety, became deeply saturated with the worst poison of hospital malaria. He was ordered north by the physicians; an illness of six months followed, the first sickness of his life.

"In February, 1865, wishing to return to the field of his labors, in Washington, he received from the then head of the Department of the Interior an appointment to a clerkship. This gave him leisure for hospital visits and secured him an income. He performed his clerical work well, and was promoted. He was now dividing his leisure hours between services to the wounded and in composing the memorial to Abraham

Lincoln, 'When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard bloomed' [of which something must be said in the sequel]. It was at this juncture that a new Secretary, Hon. James Harlan, suddenly removed him from his situation, for the reason that 'he was the author of "Leaves of Grass." ' The circumstances are far more brutal and infamous than is generally known. An eminent person, intimate with Mr. Harlan, went to him, and in a long interview thoroughly proved Walt Whitman's personal character, and the theory and intentions, at least, of his book. Harlan, in reply, merely said that the author of 'Leaves of Grass' should never be allowed in his department. [Elsewhere we are told that Harlan declared, 'If the President himself directed me to put the author of "Leaves of Grass" back in his place, I would resign sooner than do it.' High-minded, narrow-minded man, of the ruthless Inquisitorial type. This dismissal aroused much indignation throughout the country, and produced O'Connor's 'Vindication.' ]

"Immediately on this occurrence (July, 1865) Mr. Whitman was sent for by a distinguished Cabinet officer, and offered a place at his disposal, under Government [in the Attorney-General's office], of moderate pay, but an honourable position. This he accepted, and has continued to occupy since. . . .

"Since the close of the war he has continued his ministrations among the sick and wounded just the same, down to the present time (March, 1867). Every Sunday finds him at the hospital, and he frequently goes there during the week. For the maimed and the infirm of the war we have yet among us, in many a dreary case, and the wounds of the contest are still unhealed."

Here is Dr. Burroughs' summing-up of these voluntary unpaid army hospital services of Whitman; well worth meditating by honest readers hitherto

misled by the persistent calumnies, whether malignant or merely stupid, of the "infinitely little" anonymous hirelings of the press,\* who have succeeded for a time in keeping down a great man, as the multitudinous Liliputians managed to pin Gulliver to the earth:—

"I would say to the reader that I have dwelt upon this portion of Walt Whitman's life, not so much because it enters into the statement of his biography [here I dissent], as because it really enters into the statement of his poetry, and affords a light through which alone the later pieces, and in some sort the whole of his work, can be fitly construed. His large oceanic nature doubtless enjoyed fully, and grew all the larger from, the pouring out of its powerful currents of magnetism; and this is evident in his pieces since 1861.

"The statement is also needed with reference to the country, for it rises to national proportions. *To more than a hundred thousand suffering soldiers was he, during the war, personally the cheering visitor, and ministered in some form to their direct needs of body and spirit; soldiers from every quarter, west, east, north, south—for he treated the rebel wounded the same as the rest.*

"Of course there were many others, men and women, who engaged faithfully in the same service. But it is probable that no other was so endowed for it as Walt Whitman. I should say his whole character culminates

\* I term "hirelings of the press," not all those who write for hire, for circumstances compel many good and honest men to do this; but those who for hire are ready to write anything to order, on any side of any question, irrespective of their own convictions,—and their name is legion, like that of the devils in the Gospel.

here; and as a country is best viewed by ascending some peak, so from this point his life and books are to be read and understood."

Judge now between this "half Bowery boy," this "hero of the roughs," all "affectation and pretence," with his "drivel and indecency," and those who decry or condemn him. Judge between him and the "Property Committee" of Association Hall in Philadelphia, who this very March refused to let him have their Hall for a lecture; between him and the publishers who will not publish, the book-store keepers who will not keep for sale his books; between him and all "the established American poets who studiously ignore him;" between him and "the orthodox American authors, publishers, and editors," who treat him and his works with "determined denial, disgust, and scorn;" nay, between him and the superfine philosophers and philanthropists of Boston, up to Emerson himself, who having done their utmost to exasperate the South into Secession, did their utmost to exacerbate the North during the conflict and after the triumph, while he was ministering at the sacrifice of his health to "more than a hundred thousand suffering soldiers," Northerners and Southerners alike. And further, judge between this man and his country, including the relics and relatives of the more than a hundred thousand; between this man who devoted himself to such divine ministrations, and his people, who, as we were told four years ago, suffer him to languish "old, poor, and paralysed"—in his own words "poor even to penury"—old with premature age, paralysed and afflicted with *anaemia* of the brain, as

the results of the stupendous expenditure of vitality in those ministrations of mercy—"while he lies at Camden preparing, largely with his own handiwork, a small edition of his works in two volumes, which he now himself sells to keep the wolf from the door." I do not blame his people for not appreciating his poetry, nor do I imply that he has any claims upon them as a great neglected poet: when a man deliberately and consciously strikes out a new path in literature, art, philosophy, or, indeed, anything else, he should know well that it must be many years before the public will be able to make up its mind to follow him; and if such a one complains that he is left to pursue his way alone, or resents the popular shouts that he is on the new high road to nowhere, he is but a little-minded, faint-hearted fellow, or, worse still, one without any real faith in the new path, who trusted to attract followers by the mere affectation of being original, thus combining the advantages of singularity and popularity. Assuredly Whitman neither thus complains nor resents. I simply express my wonder and sorrow that the Americans, with their well-earned reputation for generosity, should allow such a great and noble public benefactor, prematurely broken down by the tremendous exertions of his public beneficence, to languish and die in neglect and poverty. Such a blot upon the name of a nation lasts long: when will Scotland be forgiven for Burns? His case is as if England were to ignore Miss Nightingale in her old age "poor even to penury" (these are his own words of himself in '76).

Knowing now the general scope of Whitman's work in the Army Hospitals, let us see in what manner he set about and accomplished it. We will first take the record of Dr. Burroughs:—

"An army surgeon, who at the time watched with curiosity Mr. Whitman's movements among the soldiers in the hospitals, has since told me that his principles of operation, effective as they were, seemed strangely few, simple, and on a low key: to act upon the appetite, to cheer by a healthy and fitly bracing appearance and demeanor, and to fill and satisfy, in certain cases, the affectional longings of the patients, was about all. He carried among them no sentimentalism nor moralizing: spoke not to any man of his 'sins'; but gave something good to eat, a buoying word, or a trifling gift and a look. He appeared with ruddy face, clean dress, with a flower or a green sprig in the lappet of his coat. Crossing the fields in summer, he would gather a great bunch of dandelion blossoms, and red and white clover, to bring and scatter on the cots, as reminders of out-door air and sunshine.

"When practicable, he came to the long and crowded wards of the maimed, the feeble, and the dying, only after preparations as for a festival—strengthened by a good meal, rest, the bath, and fresh underclothes. He entered with a huge haversack slung over his shoulder, full of appropriate articles, with parcels under his arms, and protuberant pockets. His would sometimes come in summer with a good size basket, filled with oranges, and would go round for hours paring and dividing them among the feverish and thirsty."

In another place Dr. Burroughs tells that in the fall of 1863 he himself left New York for Washington; and continues:—

"Mr. Whitman was at Washington in 1862 and 1863, engaged in the army hospitals. I easily found

him out, as he had become well known around the city, and soon made his acquaintance. I had met him once or twice without our interviews amounting to much, as I found him, although cheerful and friendly, not at all inclined to talk on any such subjects as poetry or metaphysics; when on one of my Sunday afternoon rambles in the woods, two or three miles from Washington, I plumply encountered him travelling along a foot-path between the trees, with a well-stuffed haversack slung over his shoulder, and the pockets of his overcoat also filled. He was on his way to some army hospital barracks in the vicinity, and, with his permission, I accompanied him. . . .

"The actual scene, as I saw it, of this man moving among the maimed, the pale, the low-spirited, the near-to-death, with all the incidents and interchanges between him and those suffering ones, often young almost to childhood, can hardly be pictured by any pen, however expert. His magnetism was incredible and exhaustless. It is no figure of speech, but a fact deeper than speech. The lustreless eye brightened up at his approach; his commonplace words invigorated; a bracing air seemed to fill the ward, and neutralize the bad smells. I beheld, in practical force, something like that fervid incantation of one of his own poems ['Walt Whitman,' in Section 40]:—

'To any one dying—thither I speed, and twist the knob of  
the door;  
Turn the bed-clothes toward the foot of the bed;  
Let the physician and priest go home.  
'I seize the descending man, and raise him with resistless will.  
'O despairer, here is my neck:  
By God! you shall not go down! Hang your whole weight  
upon me.  
'I dilate you with tremendous breath—I buoy you up;  
Every room of the house do I fill with an arm'd force,  
Lovers of me, bafflers of graves.'"

Here is Whitman's own account of his general mode of procedure, selected by Dr. Burroughs from the newspaper correspondence, and not included in the "Memoranda During the War":—

"My custom is to go through a ward, or collection of wards, endeavouring to give some trifle to each, without missing any. Even a sweet biscuit, a sheet of paper, or a passing word of friendliness, or but a look or nod, if no more. In this way I go among large numbers without delaying, yet do not hurry. I find out the general mood of the ward at the time; sometimes see that there is a heavy weight of listlessness prevailing, and the whole ward wants cheering up. I, perhaps, read to the men, to break the spell; calling them around me, careful to sit away from the cot of any one who is very bad with sickness or wounds. Also, I find out, by going through in this way, the cases that need special attention, and can then devote proper time to them. Of course, I am very cautious among the patients in giving them food. I always confer with the doctor, or find out from the nurse or ward-master, about a new case. But I soon get sufficiently familiar with what is to be avoided, and learn also to judge intuitively what is best.

"I buy during the hot weather boxes of oranges from time to time, and distribute them among the men; also preserved peaches and other fruits; also lemons and sugar, for lemonade. Tobacco is also much in demand. Large numbers of the men come up, as usual, without a cent of money. Through the assistance of friends in Brooklyn and Boston, I am again able to help many of those that fall in my way. It is only a small sum in each case, but it is much to them. As before, I go around daily and talk with the men, to cheer them up."

He alludes to writing letters by the bed-side:—

“I do a good deal of this, of course, writing all kinds, including love-letters. Many sick and wounded soldiers have not written home to parents, brothers, sisters, and even wives, for one reason or another, for a long, long time. Some are poor writers, some cannot get paper and envelopes, many have an aversion to writing because they dread to worry the folks at home—the facts about them are so sad to tell. I always encourage the men to write, and promptly write for them.”

Surely nothing could be more simple and succinct than the style, nothing more practical and sagacious and quietly energetic, while nobly tender-hearted, than the conduct, of this uncultivated “half Bowery boy,” this “hero of the roughs”; who confessed to Mr Conway that he had no talent for industry, that his forte consisted in loafing and writing poems, and in the opening of “Walt Whitman” had chanted,

“I loaf and invite my Soul;

I lean and loaf at my ease, observing a spear of summer grass.”

But he had at length found his true sphere of industry.

#### IV

Knowing now something of the extent and method of Whitman’s noble voluntary work in the Army Hospitals, we may consider a few of the published details. Before coming to his own “Memoranda,”

let me quote a piece from an essay on him by Joseph B. Marvin, in the quarterly "Radical Review" (New Bedford, Mass.), August, 1877:—

"There are many interesting anecdotes of his career in the hospitals. . . . There was a certain young soldier in one of the Washington Hospitals, who was suffering a tedious confinement on account of a wound; and a gentleman of the city, a relative of the young man, called often to see him. He generally found him in a despondent mood. One day, as the gentleman entered the hospital, he saw Whitman passing from cot to cot, having just visited the cot of the young friend whom he had come to see. As he approached, he found the boy with his head buried in his pillow, and when he spoke, asking what was the matter, the young fellow looked up, with tears in his eyes, but with an expression of happiness in his face despite his tears, and, with choked utterance, replied: 'Walt—Walt kissed me!' and immediately hid his face again in his pillow. Walt had found him dispirited, and, stooping down, had slipped an orange under his pillow, and kissed him, saying, probably, as he did so, 'Don't give up, my dear boy; you will come out of this all right yet!' and so had passed on to serve each poor sufferer in some tender and fitting way. 'There was no one in Washington,' says the *New York Tribune*, 'who spent more of his life for the benefit of the soldiers than Mr. Whitman. His open collar and snowy head were as well known to the boys in camp and hospital as the bright uniform of the young Napoleon himself.' [I leave it as a riddle for the junior generation: Who was this miracle of military genius?] Although Whitman was at this period but forty-five years of age, yet, as indicated in the above paragraph, his hair was gray; and this, with his gait, which was remarkably dignified and slow, gave him a venerable

appearance beyond his years [as already noted from Mr. O'Connor]. A stranger, meeting him, was pretty sure to inquire who he was, struck by his majestic and genial air, as well as by the contrast between his ruddy complexion and his gray hair. This contrast was once the cause of an amusing incident. Passing along one of the streets of the suburbs of Washington, at a time when the city was surrounded by the Confederate forces, he was stopped by two policemen, who proposed to arrest him, supposing that he wore false hair and beard, or a false face. He easily convinced them of their error, and said, 'Well, boys, if you have undertaken to arrest every man who has a false face, you will have your hands full.'

Whitman's "Memoranda During the War," which with the Notes added make a pamphlet of 68 pages of pretty close type, included in the second volume of his works, are not a reprint of his newspaper correspondence during the war, qualified by Burroughs as "quite extensive," though some of them seem to have been transferred at the time without change into that correspondence, which ought to furnish good materials for another pamphlet, or even volume. The "Memoranda" were first published some years after the war was over, in the *New York Graphic*; and here is Whitman's own account of their origin and character:—

"During the Union War I commenced at the close of 1862, and continued steadily through '63, '64, and '65, to visit the sick and wounded of the Army, both on the field and in the Hospitals in and around Washington city. [Mark the 'steadily.' See Sect. III. for Burroughs' testimony to visits every Sunday and

frequently on week days up to March '67, when he wrote.] From the first I kept little note-books for impromptu jottings in pencil to refresh my memory of names and circumstances, and what was specially wanted, &c. In these I brief'd cases, persons, sights, occurrences in camp, by the bedside, and not seldom by the corpses of the dead. Of the present Volume most of its pages are *verbatim* renderings from such pencillings on the spot. Some were scratch'd down from narratives I heard and itemized while watching, or waiting, or tending somebody amid those scenes. I have perhaps forty such little note-books left, forming a special history of those years, for myself alone, full of associations never to be possibly said or sung. I wish I could convey to the reader the associations that attach to these soil'd and creas'd little livraisons, each composed of a sheet or two of paper, folded small to carry in the pocket, and fasten'd with a pin. I leave them just as I threw them by during the War, blotch'd here and there with more than one blood-stain, hurriedly written, sometimes at the clinique, not seldom amid the excitement of uncertainty, or defeat, or of action, or of getting ready for it, or a march. Even these days, at the lapse of many years, I can never turn their tiny leaves, or even take one in my hand, without the actual army sights and hot emotions of the time rushing like a river in full tide through me. Each line, each scrawl, each memorandum, has its history. Some pang of anguish—some tragedy, profounder than poet ever wrote. Out of them arise active and breathing forms. They summon up, even in this silent and vacant room, as I write, not only the sinewy regiments and brigades, marching or in camp, but the countless phantoms of those who fell and were hastily buried by wholesale in the battle-pits, or whose dust and bones have been since removed to the National Cemeteries of the land, especially through Virginia and Tennessee."

The first of these Memoranda is dated Falmouth, Va., opposite Fredericksburgh, Decr. 21, 1862; the last, Harewood Hospital, Washington, Decr. 10, 1865. It has been remarked of the few brief extracts from Whitman's newspaper correspondence given by Dr. Burroughs: "They are above all impressive by the stern self-restraint and concision of their tenderness: the poet whose songs had been shouts of jubilation, mighty and tumultuous as the voice of many waters, has only the most simple and quiet words for the abounding agonies he witnesses and tends; it is clear that if once he should let loose his feelings from under stoical control, they would utterly overwhelm and disable him." These remarks apply to the bulk of the hospital jottings in the Memoranda, which are mainly of the same subdued tone as the record of "Three Young Men's Deaths" contributed by the Poet to the *Tobacco Plant* of April, 1879; like "muffled drums beating funeral marches to the grave": but they do not equally apply to the general observations in the Introduction and Notes written several years afterwards, or to the passages concerning Abraham Lincoln, for whom, we are told, Whitman cherished a deep personal attachment, regarding him as by far the noblest and purest of the political characters of the time, and likewise as a sort of representative historical American.

I proceed to give some too short extracts from the Memoranda, showing the pomp and glory of war in contrast with the humble obscurity of mere self-sacrifice and exhaustless brotherly love:—

"Falmouth, Va., opposite Fredericksburgh.

"1862, Decr. 21.—Out doors, at the foot of a tree, within ten yards of the front of the house, I notice a heap of amputated feet, legs, arms, hands, &c., a full load for a one-horse cart. Several ~~dead~~ bodies lie near, each cover'd with its brown woollen blanket. In the door-yard, towards the river, are fresh graves, mostly of officers, their names on pieces of barrel-staves or broken board, stuck in the dirt. (Most of these bodies were subsequently taken up and transported North to their friends.)" [Glorious War's gracious returns to widows and orphans, sisters and sweethearts: mangled and putrid carrion for living husbands and fathers, brothers and lovers; corpses or fragments of corpses demanding instant reinterment instead of strong bread-winners loving and beloved.] . . . "The large mansion is quite crowded, upstairs and down, everything impromptu, no system, all bad enough, but I have no doubt the best that can be done; all the wounds pretty bad, some frightful, the men in their old clothes, unclean and bloody. . . .

"Decr. 23 to 31.—The results of the late battles are exhibited everywhere about here in thousands of cases (hundreds die every day,) in the Camp, Brigade, and Division Hospitals. These are merely tents, and sometimes very poor ones, the wounded lying on the ground, lucky if their blankets are spread on layers of pine or hemlock twigs or small leaves. No cots; seldom even 'a mattress. It is pretty cold. The ground is frozen hard, and there is occasional snow. I go around from one case to another. I do not see that I do much good, but I cannot leave them. Once in a while some youngster holds on to me convulsively, and I do what I can for him; at any rate, stop with him and sit near him for hours, if he wishes it."

"Washington, Jany., '63.—I am now remaining in and around Washington, daily visiting the Hospitals.

Am now able to do a little good, having money, (as almoner of others home,) and getting experience. . . .

"Jany. 21.—Devoted the main part of the day to Armory Square Hospital; went pretty thoroughly through Wards F, G, H, and I; some fifty cases in each Ward. In Ward F supplied the men throughout with writing paper and stamp'd envelope each; distributed in small portions, to proper subjects, a large jar of first-rate preserv'd berries, which had been donated to me by a lady—her own cooking. Found several cases I thought good subjects for small sums of money, which I furnish'd. (The wounded men often come up broke, and it helps their spirits to have even the small sum I give them.) My paper and envelopes all gone, but distributed a good lot of amusing reading matter; also, as I thought judicious, Tobacco, oranges, apples, &c. . . . (I am more and more surprised at the very great proportion of youngsters from fifteen to twenty-one in the army. I afterwards found a still greater proportion among the Southerners.") . . .

*"Fifty Hours Left Wounded on the Field.*—Here is a case I found among the crowded cots in the Patent Office. He likes to have some one to talk to, and we will listen to him. He got badly hit in his leg and side at Fredericksburgh that eventful Saturday, 13th of December. He lay the succeeding two days and nights helpless on the field, between the city and those grim terraces of batteries; his company and regiment had been compell'd to leave him to his fate. To make matters worse, it happen'd he lay with his head slightly down hill, and could not help himself. At the end of some fifty hours he was brought off, with other wounded, under a flag of truce. . . . I ask him how the rebels treated him as he lay during those two days within reach of them—whether they came to him, whether they abused him? He answers that several of the rebels, soldiers and others, came to him, at one time

and another. A couple of them, who were together, spoke roughly and sarcastically, but nothing worse. One middle-aged man, however, who seem'd to be moving around the field, among the dead and wounded, for benevolent purposes, came to him in a way he will never forget; treated our soldier kindly, bound up his wounds, cheer'd him, gave him a couple of biscuits, and a drink of whiskey and water; ask'd him if he could eat some beef. This good Secesh, however, did not change our soldier's position, for it might have caused the blood to burst from the wounds, clotted and stagnated. . . . (It is not uncommon for the men to remain on the field this way, one, two, or even four or five days.)"

"*A Connecticut Case.*—. . . Though not more than twenty-one, or thereabouts, he has knock'd much around the world, on sea and land, and has seen some fighting on both. When I first saw him he was very sick, with no appetite. He declined offers of money—said he did not need anything. As I was quite anxious to do something, he confessed that he had a hankering for a good home-made rice pudding. . . . things in the hospital, though better than usual, revolted him. I soon procured B. his rice pudding. A Washington lady, hearing his wish, made the pudding herself, and I took it up to him the next day. He subsequently told me he lived upon it three or four days. . . . I took a fancy to him, and gave him a nice pipe, for a keepsake. He receiv'd afterwards a box of things from home, and nothing would do but I must take dinner with him, which I did, and a very good one it was. . . .

"*A Secesh Brave.*—The brave, grand soldiers are not comprised in those of one side, any more than the other. Here is a sample of an unknown Southerner, a lad of seventeen. At the War Department, a few days ago, I witnessed a presentation of captured flags to the Secretary. Among others a soldier . . . presented

a rebel battle-flag, which one of the officers stated to me was borne to the mouth of our cannon and planted there by a boy but seventeen years of age, who actually endeavor'd to stop the muzzle of the gun with fence rails. He was killed in the effort, and the flag-staff was severed by a shot from one of our men—(Perhaps in that Southern boy of seventeen, untold in history, unsung in poems, altogether unnamed, fell as strong a spirit, and as sweet, as any in all time.)"

"May 12, 1863.—*A Night Battle, over a week since. . . .* There was part of the late battle of Chancellorsville, (second Fredericksburgh,) Saturday, Saturday night and Sunday, under Gen. Joe Hooker [*Others led by STONEWALL JACKSON, who was not to lead them more*], I would like to give just a glimpse of—(a moment's look in a terrible storm at sea—of which a few suggestions are enough, and full details impossible.) . . . It was largely in the woods, and quite a general engagement. The night was very pleasant, at times the moon shining out full and clear, all Nature so calm in itself, the early summer grass so rich, and foliage of the trees—yet there the battle raging, and many good fellows lying helpless, with new accessions to them, and every minute amid the rattle of muskets and crash of cannon, (for there was an artillery contest too,) the red life-blood oozing out from heads or trunks or limbs upon that green and dew-cool grass. The woods take fire, and many of the wounded, unable to move, are consumed—quite large spaces are swept over, burning the dead also—some of the men have their hair and beards singed—some, splashes of burns on their faces and hands—others holes burnt in their clothing. . . . The flashes of fire from the cannon, the quick flaring flames and smoke, and the immense roar—the musketry so general, the light nearly bright enough for each side to see one another—the crashing, tramping of men—the yelling—close quarters

—we hear the Secesh yells—our men cheer loudly back, especially if Hooker is in sight—hand to hand conflicts, each side stands up to it, brave, determin'd as demons, they often charge upon us—a thousand deeds are done worth to write newer, greater poems on—and still the woods on fire—still many are not only scorch'd—too many, unable to move, are burn'd to death. . . . Then the camp of the wounded—O heavens, what scene is this?—is this indeed *humanity*—these butchers' shambles? There are several of them. There they lie in the largest, in an open space in the woods, from 500 to 600 poor fellows—the groans and screams—the odor of blood, mixed with the fresh scent of the night, the grass, the trees—that Slaughter-house! O well is it their mothers, their sisters cannot see them—cannot conceive, and never conceiv'd these things. . . . One man is shot by a shell, both in the arm and leg—both are amputated—there lie the rejected members. Some have their legs blown off—some bullets through the breast—some indescribably horrid wounds in the face or head, all mutilated, sickening, torn, gouged out—some in the abdomen—some mere boys—here is one his face colorless as chalk, lying perfectly still, a bullet has perforated the abdomen, life is ebbing fast, there is no help for him. In the camp of the wounded are many rebels, badly hurt—they take their regular turns with the rest, just the same as any—the surgeons use them just the same. . . . Such is the camp of the wounded—such a fragment, a reflection afar off of the bloody scene—while over all the clear large moon comes out at times softly, quietly shining. . . .

“What history, again I say, can ever give—for who can know, the mad, determin'd tussle of the armies, in all their separate large and little squads—as this—each steep'd from crown to toe in desperate, mortal purports? Who know the conflict hand-to-hand—the many conflicts in the dark, those shadowy-tangled, flashing-moonbeam'd

woods—the writhing groups and squads—hear through the woods the cries, the din, the crackling guns and pistols—the distant cannon—the cheers and calls, and threats and awful music of the oaths—the indescribable mix—the officers' orders, persuasions, encouragements—the devils fully rous'd in human hearts—the strong word, *Charge, men, charge*—the flash of the naked sword, and many a flame and smoke? . . .

“Of scenes like these, I say, who writes—who e'er can write the story? Of many a score—aye, thousands, North and South, of unwrit heroes, unknown heroisms, incredible, impromptu, first-class desperations—who tells? No history, ever—No poem sings, nor music sounds, those bravest men of all—those deeds. No formal General's report, nor print, nor book in the library, nor column in the paper, embalms the bravest, North or South, East or West. Unnamed, unknown, remain, and still remain, the bravest soldiers. Our manliest—our boys—our hardy darlings.” . . .

The concluding passage points to where the poet's heart was, his great democratic heart. Not with the prominent generals, who indeed, as a rule, had little to boast of on the Federal side; but with the common valiant soldiers, North and South, slain or wounded in undistinguished, often undistinguishable multitudes. “Unnamed, unknown, the bravest soldiers. Our manliest—our boys—our hardy darlings.”

Some delicate nerves will doubtless be shocked by his realistic glimpses into the camps of the wounded: “O heavens, what scene is this?—is this indeed *humanity*—these butchers' shambles? . . . the groans and screams—the odor of blood, mixed with the fresh scent of the night, the grass, the trees—that Slaughter-house!” War-correspon-

dents and artists are often severely blamed for picturing too clearly the real horrors of the battle-field, the ambulance, the hospital tent. What, then, shall we say of the rulers and statesmen who—for the most part wickedly and wantonly, on the one side if not on both—safe themselves, set the tremendous machinery of these horrors in motion? what of the chivalrous heroes who hire themselves out to be always ready for the human butchery, be their country's cause just or unjust? what of the pious priests and prelates who render fervent public thanksgivings to their God of Love and Mercy when the slaughter has been exceedingly great, but greater of another people than of their own? We exult and triumph in national actions whose inevitable consequences we cannot bear to look upon, even in the dim vague reflection of pictures or words. Unashamed of the deeds, we blench from their truthful record. Tender girls and women worship the scarlet at balls and reviews, while they shrink with abhorrence from the blood of which it is the proper flaming emblem, shrink with nausea from such far faint suggestions of the blood as red ink or red paint. As for the common Jingoes (we no longer need borrow *chauvinists* from the French, having by recent vile experience gotten us so much viler a name for a so much more despicable species of the same genus among ourselves)—as for the cowardly, greedy, callous, vainboastful Jingoes, of the clubs, the slums, the Exchange, the music-halls, the press, and even the pulpit, who inflame others to the carnage to which they never expose themselves, we will not heed *their* piteous protests

against the faithful record of murder and devastation. Our Poet, contemplating the still-living fragments of humanity gathered after the conflict, bursts out, "O well is it their mothers, their sisters cannot see them—cannot conceive, and never conceiv'd, these things." It is a natural cry to be wrung by such a spectacle from a heart supremely human and humane; and it was doubtless well for the personal comfort of those particular mothers and sisters that they could not see or conceive the actual state of their darlings: but it would be infinitely better if all men and women could see, or, not seeing, could conceive and *realise* in their imaginations\* such hideous shambles as are the result of every battle, such misery and desolation and bereavement as are the fruits of every campaign; for then War would be soon extinct, drowned and consumed beyond resuscitation in a lava flood of horror and loathing, throughout all our pseudo-civilised world. Therefore, the more plainly, the more brutally and disgustingly, because the more veraciously, the horrors and agonies of war

\* "The great secret of morals is love, or a going out of our own nature, and an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action, or person [? passion], not our own. A man to be greatly good, must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and of many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own."—Shelley: "Defence of Poetry." Exquisitely applicable to Shelley himself, this is no less exquisitely applicable to Whitman, who might well declare of himself in the words of his glorious predecessor:

"*Me, who am as a nerve o'er which do creep  
The else-unfelt oppressions of this earth*"

can be depicted by pen and pencil and related by word of mouth, the better; that the poor, foolish, *unimaginative* people who are fascinated by the flaunting trappings of War in peace, may be terrified into shuddering abhorrence of War in action; ravaging, burning, mangling, murdering; changing rich fields to trampled swamps, fair cities to black ruins, brave strong men to carrion; leaving parents childless, children fatherless, wives widowed, maidens frustrate of wifehood and motherhood. "*Sensational*"? Are you so imbecile as to dream that there can be one-thousandth part so much "sensation" in any writing or picture as in the fever-stricken, the wounded, the maimed, the ruined, the dying, and all their afflicted families, the teeming produce of every glorious War?

## V

Judging by myself, I think the reader who has not met with Whitman's works (and they do not by any means come in everybody's way) will be interested in some further extracts from his "*Memoranda During the War*," which I therefore proceed to give. I may as well note here that there is frequent mention of gifts of Tobacco, for which the wounded (as was also the case in the Franco-German War) had a keen longing, and which, when smoked, must have performed the double service of comforting and soothing the poor smoker, and of tending to disinfect the ward from the deadly hospital malaria.

On p. 18, under date June 18, 1863, we have a parenthesis confirming a passage cited from Dr. Burroughs in Sect. III. :

"In my visits to the Hospitals I found it was in the simple matter of Personal Presence, and emanating ordinary cheer and magnetism, that I succeeded and help'd more than by medical nursing, or delicacies, or gifts of money, or anything else. During the war I possess'd the perfection of physical health. [As stated in Sect. III., the illness from hospital malaria during the latter half of 1864 was the first in his life.] My habit, when practicable, was to prepare for starting out on one of those daily or nightly tours, of from a couple to four or five hours, by fortifying myself with previous rest, the bath, clean clothes, a good meal, and as cheerful an appearance as possible." And on p. 36 we read: "Another thing became clear to me—while *cash* is not amiss to bring up the rear, tact and magnetic sympathy and unction are, and ever will be, sovereign still."

(The following, which appears to me very tender and wise and beautiful in its perfect simplicity, is also given by Burroughs, so was presumably transcribed verbatim for the correspondence.)

*"A New York Soldier."*—This afternoon, July 22 (we are still in '63), I have spent a long time with Oscar F. Wilber, Company G, 154th New York, low with chronic diarrhoea, and a bad wound also. He ask'd me to read to him a chapter in the New Testament. I complied, and ask'd him what I should read. He said: 'Make your own choice.' I open'd at the close of one of the first books of the Evangelists, and read the chapter describing the latter hours of Christ, and the scenes at the crucifixion. The poor, wasted young man ask'd me to read the following chapter also, how

Christ rose again. I read very slowly, for Oscar was feeble. It pleas'd him very much, yet the tears were in his eyes. He ask'd me if I enjoyed religion. I said: 'Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, may-be, it is the same thing.' He said: 'It is my chief reliance.' He talk'd of death, and said he did not fear it. I said: 'Why, Oscar, don't you think you will get well?' He said: 'I may, but it is not probable.' He spoke calmly of his condition. The wound was very bad, it discharg'd much. Then the diarrhœa had prostrated him, and I felt he was even then the same as dying. He behaved very manly and affectionate. The kiss I gave him as I was about leaving he return'd fourfold. He gave me his mother's address. I had several such interviews with him. He died a few days after the one just described."

Creatures of the type of Appleton's anonymuncule may find this kissing of man and man very maudlin. Others may remember a certain "Kiss me, Hardy."

"Aug. 8.—To-night, as I was trying to keep cool, sitting by a wounded soldier in Armory Square, I was attracted by some pleasant singing in an adjoining Ward. As my soldier was asleep, I left him, and entering the Ward where the music was, I walk'd half way down and took a seat by the cot of a young Brooklyn friend, S. R., badly wounded in the hand at Chancellorsville, and who had suffer'd much, but who at that moment in the evening was wide awake and comparatively easy. He had turn'd over on his left side to get a better view of the singers, but the plentiful drapery of the mosquito curtains of the adjoining cots obstructed the sight. I stept round and loop'd them all up, so that he had a clear show, and then sat down again by him, and look'd and listened. The principal singer was a young lady nurse of one of the Wards, accompanying on a melodeon, and

join'd by the lady nurses of other Wards. They sat there, making a charming group, with their handsome, healthy faces ; and standing up a little behind them were some ten or fifteen of the convalescent soldiers, young men, nurses, &c., with books in their hands, taking part in the singing. Of course it was not such a performance as the great soloists at the New York Opera House take a hand in ; but I am not sure but I receiv'd as much pleasure, under the circumstances, sitting there, as I have had from the best Italian compositions, express'd by world-famous performers. . . . The scene was, indeed, an impressive one. The men lying up and down the hospital, in their cots (some badly wounded—some never to rise thence), the cots themselves, with their drapery of white curtains, and the shadows down the lower and upper parts of the Ward ; then the silence of the men, and the attitudes they took—the whole was a sight to look around upon again and again. And there, sweetly rose those female voices up to the high white-washed wooden roof, and pleasantly the roof sent it all back again. They sang very well ; mostly quaint old songs and declamatory hymns, to fitting tunes. Here, for instance, is one of the songs they sang :—

#### SHINING SHORES.

My days are swiftly gliding by, and I a Pilgrim stranger,  
Would not detain them as they fly, those hours of toil and  
danger ;

For O we stand on Jordan's strand, our friends are passing over,  
And just before, the shining shores we may almost discover.

We'll gird our loins, my brethren dear, our distant home  
discerning,

Our absent Lord has left us word, let every lamp be burning ;  
For O we stand on Jordan's strand, our friends are passing over,  
And just before, the shining shores we may almost discover.

“As the strains reverberated through the great

edifice of boards (an excellent place for musical performers), it was plain to see how it all sooth'd and was grateful to the men. I saw one near me turn over, and bury his face partially in his pillow; he was probably ashamed to be seen with wet eyes."

There is a subject for a painter competent to realise and paint it.

Aug., p. 24: "*Soldiers and Talks.*—Soldiers, soldiers, soldiers, you meet them everywhere about the city [Washington], often superb-looking men, though invalids dress'd in worn uniforms and carrying canes and crutches. I often have talks with them, sometimes quite long and interesting. One, for instance, will have been through the peninsula under McClellan —narrates to me the fights, the marches, the strange, quick changes of that eventful campaign, and gives glimpses of many things untold in any official reports or books or journals. These, indeed, are the things that are genuine and precious. The man was there, has been out two years, has been through a dozen fights, the superfluous flesh of talking is long work'd off him, and now he gives me little but the hard meat and sinew. . . . I find it refreshing, these hardy, bright, intuitive American young men (experienced soldiers with all their youth). The vital play and significance moves one more than books. Then there hangs something majestic about a man who has borne his part in battles, especially if he is very quiet regarding it when you desire him to unbosom. I am continually lost [bewildered, astonished] at the absence of blowing and blowers [boasting and boasters] among these old-young American militaires. I have found some man or another who has been in every battle since the War began, and have talked with them about each one, in every part of the United States, and many of the engagements on the rivers and

harbors too. I find men here from every State of the Union without exception. (There are more Southerners, especially Border State men, in the Union army than is generally supposed.) I now doubt whether one can get a fair idea of what this War practically is, or what genuine America is, and her character, without some such experience as I am now having."

On p. 26, under date August, September, and October, '63, we read in a general description of the Washington Army Hospitals :

"Here in Washington, when they are all fill'd (as they have been already several times), they contain a population more numerous in itself than the whole of the Washington of ten or fifteen years ago. Within sight of the Capitol, as I write, are some fifty or sixty such collections or camps, at times holding from fifty to seventy thousand men."

So many *unripe* fruits of glorious war; the fully ripe were the dead, "The Million Dead" of whom we read on pp. 56 and 57; thus :

"—the Infinite Dead—the land entire is saturated, perfumed with their impalpable ashes' exhalations in Nature's chemistry distill'd, and shall be so forever, and every grain of wheat and ear of corn, and every flower that grows and every breath we draw—not only Northern dead leavening Southern soil—thousands, aye many tens of thousands of Southerners crumble to-day in Northern earth.

"And everywhere among these countless graves—everywhere in the many Soldier Cemeteries of the Nation (there are over seventy of them), as at the time in the vast trenches, the depositaries of slain, Northern and Southern, after the great battles—not only where the scathing trail pass'd those years, but radiating since in all the peaceful quarters of the land—we see, and

see, and ages yet may see, on monuments and grave-stones, singly or in masses, to thousands or tens of thousands, the significant word

UNKNOWN.

In some of the Cemeteries nearly *all* the dead are Unknown. At Salisbury, N.C., for instance, the known are only 85, while the Unknown are 12,027, and 11,700 of these are buried in trenches. A National Monument has been put up here, by order of Congress, to mark the spot—but what visible, material monument can ever fittingly commemorate that spot?"

So much for military glory. See also among the poems completing the second volume, under the general title "Passage to India," the section *Ashes of Soldiers*.

Page 27, under date Oct. 20:

*Spiritual Characters among the Soldiers*.—Every now and then, in Hospital or Camp, there are beings I meet—specimens of unworldliness, disinterestedness and animal purity and heroism—perhaps some unconscious Indianian, or from Ohio or Tennessee—on whose birth the calmness of heaven seems to have descended, and whose gradual growing up, whatever the circumstances of work-life or change, or hardship, or small or no education that attended it, the power of a strange, spiritual sweetness, fibre and inward health have also attended. Something veil'd and abstracted is often a part of the manners of these beings. I have met them, I say, not seldom in the Army, in Camp, and in the great Hospitals. The Western regiments contain many of them. They are often young men, obeying the events and occasions about them, marching, soldiering, fighting, foraging, cooking, working on farms, or at some trade, before the war—unaware of their own nature, (as to that, who is aware of his own nature?) their companions only understanding that they are

different from the rest, more silent, 'something odd about them,' and apt to go off and meditate and muse in solitude.

Similarly in the "Drum-Taps," vol. I., p. 295:—

"O tan-faced prairie-boy !  
Before you came to camp came many a welcomed gift ;  
Praises and presents came, and nourishing food—  
till at last, among the recruits,  
You came, taciturn, with nothing to give—we but  
look'd on each other,  
When lo ! more than all the gifts of the world you gave me."

Page 31, under date "Washington Again—Summer of 1864," he having been with the Army in Virginia :—

"In these Wards, or on the field, as I thus continue to go round, I have come to adapt myself to each emergency, after its kind or call, however trivial, however solemn—every one justified and made real under its circumstances—not only visits and cheering talk and little gifts—not only washing and dressing wounds, (I have some cases where the patient is unwilling anyone should do this but me)—but passages from the Bible, expounding them, prayer at the bedside, explanations of doctrine, &c. (I think I see my friends smiling at this confession, but I was never more in earnest in my life)."

His friends might smile because in his poem of *Walt Whitman*, and elsewhere, while proclaiming himself and his writings supremely religious, he had at the same time proclaimed himself supremely indifferent in relation to all the various gods and creeds.

"Taking them all for what they are worth, and not a cent more."

“ Not objecting to special revelations—considering a curl of smoke, or a hair on the back of my hand, just as curious as any revelation.”

“ The supernatural of no account—myself waiting to be one of the Supremes.”

“ What do you suppose I would intimate to you in a hundred ways, but that man or woman is as good as God ?

And that there is no God more divine than Yourself.”

“ I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contain’d ;

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition ;  
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins ;

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God ;

Not one is dissatisfied—not one is demented with the mania of owning things ;

Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago ;

Not one is respectable and industrious over the whole earth.”

And in the great Preface to the first edition of “Leaves of Grass,” reprinted, in its integrity, as already stated, by Mr. W. M. Rossetti,\* we read :—

“ The whole theory of the special and supernatural, and all that was twined with or educed out of it, departs as a dream.”

\* I have seen a copy of this first edition, which was set up by Whitman himself. The prose Preface had a most curious appearance, there being three or four or more points after every clause, or nearly every clause, of every sentence. Mr. Rossetti in reprinting adopted, wisely, the ordinary mode of setting up.

"It is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women."

"There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile—perhaps a generation or two,—dropping off by degrees. A superior breed shall take their place. A new order shall arise ; and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest."

And, peculiarly characteristic (as it has been remarked) of his own nature and poetry : "The soul has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride, and the one balances the other, and neither can stretch too far while it stretches in company with the other."

So the friends might well smile, and yet we may well believe that he was never more earnest in his life. His main object was to comfort and support, and, if possible, cure the patients ; and if any of them found comfort and support and healing in passages from the Bible, and prayers by the bedside and explanations of theological doctrines, he would of course administer these as patiently and cheerfully as any other restorative or remedy which the poor men might long for and he could obtain. In other words, he had none of that fanatical bigotry so common among so-called Free thinkers, and so much more disgusting than the bigotry of the superstitious, because the latter avow themselves fettered by stark dogmas while the former claim to be liberal and free. Spinoza smoking a calm pipe in the company of his simple host and hostess,

could assure them, with the sincerity of wisdom, that they did well to go to church, that their religion would certainly save them if they were good and true. So Whitman, as we have seen, when asked by poor Oscar Wilber whether he enjoyed religion, could honestly reply, "Perhaps not, my dear, in the way you mean, and yet, may-be, it is the same thing."

P. 33.—"After the battles at Columbia, Tennessee, where we repulsed about a dozen of vehement rebel charges, they left a great many wounded on the ground, mostly within our range. Whenever any of these wounded attempted to move away by any means, generally by crawling off, our men, without exception, brought them down by a bullet. They let none crawl away, no matter what his condition."

The magnanimous chivalry of War!

P. 36.—"I am regularly supplied with funds for this purpose [gifts to the many wounded, without a cent of money in their pockets], by good women and men in Boston, Salem, Providence, Brooklyn, and New York. . . . My supplies, altogether voluntary, mostly confidential, often seeming quite Providential, were numerous and varied. For instance, there were two distant and wealthy ladies, sisters, who sent regularly, for two years, quite heavy sums, enjoining that their names should be kept secret. The same delicacy was indeed a frequent condition. From several I had *carte blanche*. Many were entire strangers. From these sources, during from two to three years, in the Hospitals, I bestow'd, as almoner for others, many, many thousands of dollars. I learn'd one thing conclusively—that beneath all the ostensible greed and heartlessness of our times there is no end to the generous benevolence of men

and women in the United States, when once sure of their object."

1865, Feb. 28.—"Soon after I met John Wormley, 9th Alabama, is a West Tennessee raised boy, parents both dead—had the look of one for a long time on short allowance—said very little—chew'd Tobacco at a fearful rate, spitting in proportion—large clear dark-brown eyes, very fine—didn't know what to make of me—told me at last he wanted much to get some clean under-clothes and a pair of decent pants. Didn't care about coat or hat fixings. Wanted a chance to wash himself well and put on the underclothes. I had the very great pleasure of helping him to accomplish all those wholesome designs."

[Here the articles, as printed in *Cope's Tobacco Plant*, end; but two more sections were written, the MS. of which may possibly be some day recovered, though it is not now to be found.]







